THE MOTHER OF GOETHE

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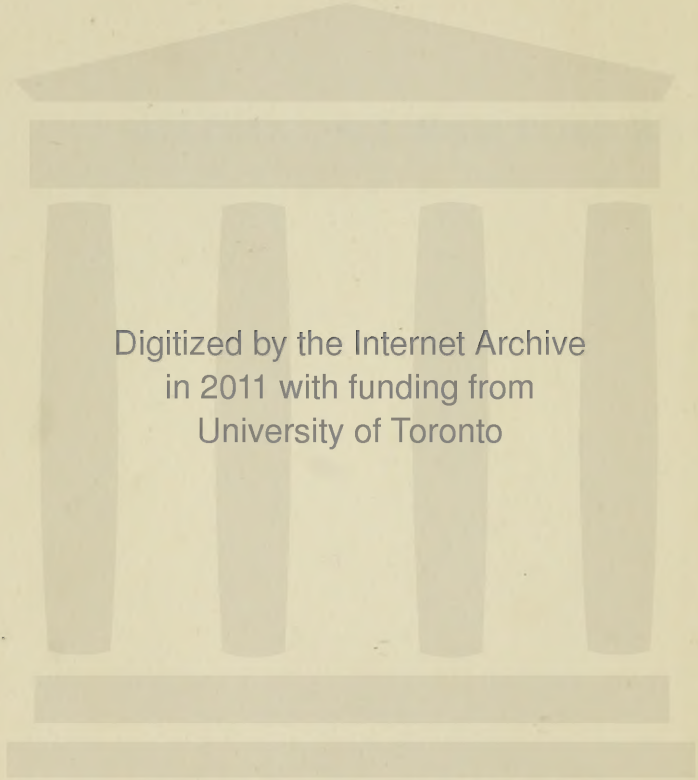
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Elizabeth Gordon

THE MOTHER OF GOETHE

: : "FRAU AJA" : :

BY MARGARET REEKS

WITH A PHOTOGRAVURE FRONTISPIECE
& SEVENTEEN OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

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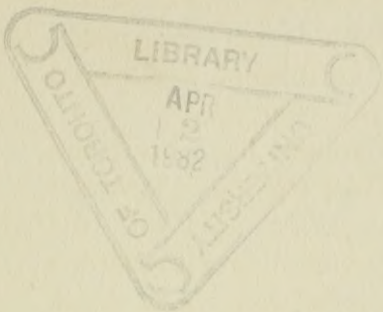

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PREFACE

FRAU AJA's claim on the interest of the British Public lies, first and mainly, in her relationship to her great son; having established this claim, she will be liked for her own hearty sake.

The author of this sketch has borrowed largely and often literally from Goethe's *Wahrheit und Dichtung*, more guardedly and with the reservation necessary when dealing with Bettina von Arnim from *Briefwechsel mit einem Kind.* Other sources drawn from are C. Heinemann's *Goethe* and *Goethes Mutter*, *Goethe's Mother* by A. S. Gibbs, *Die Briefe der Frau Rath*, Koster, and lastly the publications of the *Goethe-Gesellschaft*, so ably edited by Herr Suphan, must be thankfully mentioned, since without them the present work could never have been contemplated.

It is universally allowed that the subtle beauty of Goethe's poetry eludes translation, being dependent for its rare charm so greatly on grace of form, it is as a jewel torn from a fine setting when presented in a foreign language.

MARGARET REEKS

1911

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THE MOTHER OF GOETHE

CHAPTER I

CHILDHOOD—GIRLHOOD

Doch ist Frau Aja auserkohrn
in einem guten Zeichen gebohrn.
Kennt brave Leute desz ist sie froh,
und singt In dulci Jubilo.*

FRAU AJA.

IT is a fact, worth consideration, that each generation has clasped the living hand of the one that went before; yet, though there is no gap in this human contact, the genuine portraits in the gallery of History are few and far between. Dimly we discern the colossal image of Job, roughed out from human character as by the hand of a Michelangelo. There is the more finished portrait of David. There is the clear-cut cameo of Socrates, Plato's faithful handiwork. The perfect beauty of the Divine portrait we have from the evangelists. Cicero, in one tiny, pathetic, unstudied sentence,

* The stars did bless Frau Aja's birth,
And gave her cause for joy and mirth.
Many good folk she knows and so,
She sings In dulci Jubilo.

"Quid Tulliola mea fiet?" *

addressed to his dead daughter, shows us a more intimate glimpse of himself than in his polished orations or in that long homily to his less-loved son.

Homer's features are lost to us; Shakespeare's are hardly recognisable. In later times, Pepys, with broad, coarse touches and unmistakable likeness, has drawn his own shrewd countenance. Boswell, by minute accuracy, has made his huge hero live. Goethe's portrait of himself, notwithstanding a trace of artificiality—which he has indicated by the *Dichtung* of his title—is true and lifelike.

But, in the shadow of these masterpieces, sometimes an exquisite sketch is revealed. Beside the portrait of David, we may discern, though not so vividly, Jonathan. Beside the Divine portrait is that most human sketch of Saint Peter; and there is another sketch, very similar to this, seen with the portrait of Goethe—that of Frau Aja, his mother.

Goethe himself was an adept at character-drawing. Take, for example, this thumb-nail sketch of Lavater:

"On Sundays, after the sermon, it was his duty as minister to hold the little short-handled velvet bag towards those going out, and to receive the charitable donations with a blessing. This Sunday, for instance, he set himself the task of

* "What will become of my little Tullia?"

looking at no one, but of taking note only of hands and construing their shape. But not alone did he observe the form of the fingers, the very expression of them as they dropped in the gift did not escape his attention; he had much to say to me about it afterwards. How instructive and stimulating must such conversations be for me—me who was qualifying as a painter of men."

This is indeed characteristic of the single-minded Lavater, not less characteristic of the mentally versatile Goethe, watching sympathetically, and above all, never forgetful of self-culture.

Goethe, the son she so loved, has put in the first touches of his mother's portrait: she has finished it with her own true hand. To make a flattering ideal of it would be doing her scant justice; only would we reproduce the wise, strong, tender features, because they are good and pleasant to look upon.

Germany, of course, also France and America possess literary sketches of Goethe's mother. England alone has hitherto published none.

Frau Aja (how she obtained this name will be explained hereafter)* was one of those precious souls who take cheerily whatever Life offers—its good things heartily, its buffets in brave silence.

"I know no fear," she says: "let that come

* See p. 155.

which I cannot hinder—enjoy the present—and, since I cannot check the spokes of the great wheel, it would be but foolishness to grizzle because one feels oneself too weak."

A very simple, yet very sufficing philosophy, this is the keynote of her whole existence—submission to, nay, cheerful acquiescence in, the inevitable.

Frau Aja, or, to give her actual name, Katharina Elizabeth Textor, was born in the year 1731. Her parents were citizens in good position, of that old-world, time-honoured city, Frankfurt-am-Main.

Rich in historic memories was Frankfurt. It had never sunk below the stream of events, but, maintaining a sturdy independence, had always floated on the top of the tide of time. Since 1147 the scene of the imperial elections, by successive emperors it had been wooed with many privileges and immunities. In 1562 it was chosen as their *Kronungstadt*, or coronation town. The very names of some of its inhabitants recalled the past. The name *Textor* was in fact a Latin substitute for *Weber*, handed down from the affectations of the fifteenth century, from the days when *Gerrard* was exchanged for *Erasmus* and bluff *Swartzerde* took the Greek form *Melancthon*.

It is, perhaps, not to be regretted that we have no record of Elizabeth's childish sayings and doings, since, in this biographical age, the childish

sayings and doings of celebrities are becoming somewhat trite.

Nevertheless, if we accept the very plausible supposition of Eric Smith that the opening conversation in Goethe's *Erwin and Elmire* was merely his mother's account of her own upbringing, we can form some notion of her childhood.

Olimpia tells her daughter :

"When I was young we knew nothing of all these fine ways, just as we knew nothing of the parade that children are accustomed to nowadays. They let us learn to read and write, and for the rest of the time, all was freedom and joy in our first years. We mixed with children of a lower class without injury to our manners. We were allowed to run wild. Our mothers were not afraid for our frocks, we had no furbelows to tear, no lace to soil, no ribbons to rumple, our cotton frocks could soon be washed. No thin German-French governess followed us about, venting her bad temper on us, presuming to make us as stiff, vain and foolish as herself. It always makes me miserable to see the little wretches of to-day dragged about the streets. It is just like the men at the fair, with whips driving their dogs and apes about on two legs, in troops, dressed up in hooped petticoats and frippery, and paying them out by hard blows, when Nature asserts herself and just for once they drop down and run *à leur aise* on all fours.

"ELMIRE. I must say, mamma, you are unfair,

you exaggerate, and won't see the good side. What advantages modern education gives us!

"OLIMPIA. I am glad to hear it! advantages? I thought the greatest advantage in the world was to be contented. We were when we were young. We played, sprang, made a noise, and were quite big girls when we still enjoyed swinging and playing at ball. . . . Now people bring their children together, sit them round in a circle like ladies, and they have their coffee handed to them, like ladies. In my time they were seated at a table and made comfortable; now they must be out-and-out ladylike; and suffer from ladylike *ennui*, and all the time they are really children at heart, spoilt because, from the very beginning of their lives, they dare not be what they really are.

"ELMIRE. All the same, our present way of life requires it; if we were brought up in the old style, what figures we should cut in society!

"OLIMPIA. Figures, girl? the figures your mothers were and of which there is nothing to be ashamed. Don't you think, then, that one could become an agreeable girl, and an upright woman if one had been allowed to be a child? . . . . I tell you the child's shoes wear out of themselves when they are too short. . . . Indeed the best of our sex that I have known were those who had least education.

"ELMIRE. But our culture! Our talents!

"OLIMPIA. That's just the worst of it, they are no use to you, or they even make you unhappy. We knew nothing of all that nonsense; we tripped through our songs and minuets on the

clavichord, and sang and danced to them. Poor children nowadays are not allowed their singing and dancing to their instruments; they are trained to play rapidly, and have to execute brilliantly instead of playing simple melodies; they are tortured instead of being amused; and what for? to be brought out! to be admired! By whom? Where?—by people who don't understand it, or chatter the whole time, or clap heartily at the end, because they want to make a display themselves, that they in their turn may be not listened to, and applauded at the end from habit or ridicule."

History repeats itself: feminine childhood is again asserting its right to "run wild" and romp. The Early Victorian girl, with her prim governess, the correct utterer of "papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes, and prism," is passing.

But what shall we—the claimants of women's education—say to Frau Aja's assertion, "Indeed the best of our sex that I have known were those who had least education?" If we consider what she meant by education—the showy playing on the clavichord, the singing of songs in bad Italian, the drawing of impossible pictures—then we shall heartily agree with her.

It is well to ascertain clearly what education signifies before introducing it on a large scale and without a wise discrimination. Certainly no good result can be obtained by mere "cramming"; for it is not in this way that we may draw out each

nature to its perfect development and highest capacity. We gather from the foregoing extract that Frau Aja's childhood was free and joyous, the fitting foundation for her blithe, contented womanhood. Of the delightful period of irresponsible girlhood, she had but brief experience, since at seventeen she became a wife, at eighteen a mother.

Her early environment and her temperament were in complete accord. She says in a letter to her son: "Order and quiet were my element, even in my young years," and describing herself to a friend she writes: "Order and quiet are my principal characteristics." Order and quiet were the characteristics of her home.

The old *Stammhaus* (ancestral house) of the Textor family, standing in the Friedberger Street, —a name in itself suggestive of peace—gave little promise outwardly of the peace within. Nothing was to be seen on approaching it but a massive gateway, flanked on either hand by battlements. The adjoining houses pressed close to this warlike remnant of antiquity, as if seeking protection. But, within, the character of the house changed. A narrow passage gave entrance to a fairly large courtyard surrounded by the irregular buildings which formed the dwelling.

Quiet respectability and family order here reigned supreme. Life was as regular as clockwork; the midday dinner, the afternoon nap,

were essentials; indeed, the even tenor of day succeeding day gave an impression of eternal monotony. It was as if life had run into a *cul-de-sac* and had curled up for a nap there.

The master of this household was well in keeping with it. His grandson—ever open-eyed for the picturesque figures of existence—draws two several sketches of him.

One is of the fine old mayor, seated on his throne-like seat, beneath his Emperor's portrait, in full peruke, long robes, gold chain and all the paraphernalia of office. The other is of the easy citizen tending his flowers and fruit in his old-world garden, garbed in a comfortable dressing-gown with his feet in slippers; on his hands, to shield them from the thorns, a pair of marvellous leather gloves, slashed, stitched and tasselled. These marvellous gardening gloves were annually renewed at no expense to the wearer; they were in fact a yearly tribute, received by the *Schultheiss*, the chief magistrate, as the Emperor's representative, from neighbouring cities grateful for ancient abatement of taxation, and the thrifty old gentleman thus slyly turned useless emblems to practical account.

But at the time of which we write the Schultheiss was yet in the prime of life, a silent, dignified personage, whose daily routine satisfied pleasantly his powers and desires.

His love of "ancient peace" pervaded his surroundings and formed his habits. No modern article or piece of furniture found place in his panelled study. His books were legal works or descriptions of ancient voyages and travels.

Duty ever came first with him. Before he came down to the family breakfast, he had carefully arranged the list of causes for the day and gone through his legal papers.

But, duty done, he was always to be found in his old-world garden, diligently pruning, weeding, watering, from early spring till late autumn, whilst a merry group, a boy and girls, frolicked about him, keeping, however, a respectful distance, with bright keen eyes for the stray nectarines that occasionally came their way, and now and then—when longing threatened to get the better of discretion—scampering off to stuff their mouths with less valued currants or gooseberries.

The mother of the family also accorded with its household peace, a quiet, gentle woman, devoted to her husband, proud of his position, a little shy of sharing his honours, drawing back timidly behind other ladies when she had to take part in State functions, yet not without a quiet courage for domestic emergencies. Her grandson has given us one characteristic glimpse of her also. He tells us that one night he was awakened by an alarm of fire in the house. It

appeared to come from the direction of her bedroom. In some trepidation he hastened thither, to find the old lady of sixty-two already on the alert, calmly helping to collect and remove the plate and valuables. After doing all that was possible, he says, together they quietly awaited the course of Fate.

In this serene home, Elizabeth was eldest daughter, and, as we have said, its peaceful ways were her ways. She took care of the younger children, and, though it is recorded that she was not fond of domestic duties, she probably did her share conscientiously, for it would hardly have been possible to become so good a housewife and mother as Frau Aja eventually was, without going through some practical training; yet when duty was done, she *did* like to dress herself with the dainty care which earned her the nickname of "Princess" from mother and sisters, and sit down to her fancy-work or her book in genteel leisure.

What were the books she read? We would gladly know. German literature offered little at that period. At some time of her life she managed to read a great deal; even the works of English authors were known to her, but that must have been later.

In one of her letters she gives a specimen of the kind of play popular in her youth.

The scene was a wood; on the trees hung

portraits of ancient heroes. Hermann and his father enter. The father addresses his son thus: "Listen, Hermann, and note thoughtfully why thy father has brought thee to this grove. Son! ! ! when courage and fortune lead thee to high deeds; then [he turns towards the trees] let these pictures teach thee,—and so on. I have forgotten Hermann's answer," she adds, "for I was only ten when it came out."

Let us hope her books were not after the same pattern, that the mother of the man whose imagination was to fire that of a nation had something better whereon to feed her own. At any rate, if the pages were dull, she would read into them brilliant and romantic histories, for below the quiet stream of her fancy flowed the strong current from which genius was eventually to rise.

Nor was mysticism, that essentially German element, far from this outwardly prosaic family. The silent Schultheiss was himself a dreamer of dreams, a reputed seer into futurity. He confided his visions only to his wife, yet sometimes the children — their young ears pricked for mystery—heard and were duly impressed by their father's dreams.

That the prophet's visions were more shrewd conjecture than supernatural visitations would not occur to his simple household.

One of his dreams alone concerns us, since it caused his eldest daughter an amusing little family triumph.

He had dreamed, and no doubt his wish was father to his thought, that the Schultheiss who held office died, and that from all his brother Sheriffs *he* was elected successor.

No one except the little princess remembered this dream ; she cherished it in her young ambitious heart, until in course of time the Schultheiss did die. Then Textor was summoned to attend, with the other Sheriffs, the drawing of the golden ball from the bag where it lay with two silver ones, by which primitive method the Mayor of Frankfurt was elected.

As soon as her father was out of the house, Elizabeth ran upstairs, dressed herself in all her best finery, frizzed her hair to the utmost, and stationed herself at the window, so that, when he should return in state attended by a procession of senators and dignitaries, one member of his family, at least, should be in proper array to receive the stately visitors.

Mother and sisters laughed at the "princess." Would it not be time to prepare for the reception when they heard the result of the election ?

"You will soon have to creep behind the curtains," Elizabeth declared, "when they come in their state to congratulate us about father's

election, and you are not dressed and your hair is all out of curl."

Then she returned to her watch at the window, and next minute, from her seat, she caught sight of a solemn procession.

"Here they come," she cried.

The others took one hurried peep; then fled, leaving the "princess" alone in the parlour to receive the grand personages, who solemnly entered, saluted their new Schultheiss's daughter, presenting her with a little senator doll, dressed in long peruke, with real gold buckles on his shoes, and a collar with tassels of real pearl.

How her sisters must have envied her!

Next in age to Elizabeth, three years younger, came Johanna, a lively little maiden. Whilst Elizabeth stayed patiently at home awaiting the coming of experience, Johanna ran abroad to seek it and fell in with excitement instead. No domestic power, no parental command, could keep the vivacious child in the house, when anything was going on without.

As quite a tiny mite, she one day scrambled with the town children for largess, thrown at some state function, and though only a girl and a small one, managed to get a share. But, alas, as with round delighted eyes and too childish trustfulness she stood gazing on the treasure displayed in her open hands, by a sudden jerk some naughty

urchin sent the coins flying, so that she saw her hardly earned booty again a prey to a scrambling mob.

When a little older, she was accustomed to amuse herself by collecting the neglected babies of the town and generally mothering them.

Four years after Johanna, came another sister, Anna Maria ; then, a year younger, the only boy, Johann Jost, followed at an interval of four years by baby Anna Christina, so that the Schultheiss had his quiver full and Elizabeth had plenty of mothering to do for the "arrows."

The existence of the young Textors was by no means a dull one. Their native city, with its fine situation on the River Main, its quaint solemnities, remnants of mediæval times, and its pageant-loving citizens, was itself full of interest. To begin with, there were the half-yearly fairs instituted in 1330. These took place in April and September. At those times it appeared as if a new and magic town had suddenly sprung up within old Frankfurt, so many were the booths and stalls erected. Bustle and excitement took possession of the staid citizens. Friends and relations came from the country. People of rank flocked in from the neighbourhood. The packing and unpacking of the numerous and varied wares presented to the minds of the spectators a lively

picture of the trade of the great world that lay beyond their limited ken.

In letters of a later time, Frau Aja delights to describe the hubbub, in these words, quoted from Goethe's *Jahrmarktsfest zu Plundersweilen:*

"With us," she writes, "is fair time ! ! !— Weilmäuligte Laffen, Feilschen und gaffen, Gaffen und kauffen, Bestienhauffen. Kinder und Fratzen. Affen und Katzen, u.s.w." The sense of this helter-skelter passage is as follows: "Open-mouthed gabies, higgling and staring, staring and buying, crowds of beasties, children and grotesques, apes and cats." To render the rough motion and tumult of the original is not possible, it is conveyed by the jingle of the harsh-sounding words.

These fairs were accompanied by quaint old customs, themselves relics of warlike ages: keen traders bringing their wares needed martial escort and then this escort was in its turn an object of suspicion to the burghers, who sallied forth to meet it, to parley with it, and ultimately to decide how near it should be allowed to approach the city walls.

Though the need for such military protection had long since passed away, the semblance of it was perpetuated. The city cavalry rode forth to meet important personages as of yore. They met no longer inimically, but sociably, and,

having passed some hours in friendly hospitality, the troops returned late in the evening, perhaps a little uproariously. The townsfolk turned out, not to oppose their entry, but to amuse themselves with their companions' jollity; the falling night threw into bold relief the torch-lit scene, whilst shadowing its meaner aspects.

Another time-honoured ceremony, wherein the family of the Schultheiss had a more personal interest, was the *Pfeifergericht*—the Piper's Tribunal.

It took place the day before Lady Day. A portion of the great Imperial hall called the *Römer*—the council-house—was enclosed, and made a fitting background for the ancient spectacle.

Here on a throne-like seat sat the Schultheiss, in almost regal state, surrounded by the Sheriffs. A pretence was made of carrying on the routine business of the day. Suddenly this was interrupted by a weird piping, as of a magnified Pied Piper. Three musicians appeared, dressed in blue and gold, with their music scores attached to their sleeves, their instruments being a shawm, a sackbut and an oboe. Followed by a mediæval procession they solemnly entered the hall.

Business ceased, an air of surprise was assumed, as if the interruption came unexpectedly, then

amid silence and due respect, the deputies from neighbouring towns presented emblematic gifts to the Schultheiss. Worms, for instance, sent a felt hat; some other locality, a handsome pair of slashed and tasselled gloves. The hat did duty on many successive occasions, the gloves became in one case, as we have seen, the gardening gloves of the Schultheiss.

After the presentation the pipers again blew a blast: then, with mock solemnity, the procession departed as it had come.

Of course in such a scene the young family of the chief actor would be intensely interested and were doubtless duly honoured spectators. Though they would be impressed more by the antique dignity than by the modern absurdity, though they would enjoy their own reflected importance and carry the remembrance of it into their every-day life, yet we may be sure that Elizabeth's sense of humour and Johanna's vivacious gaiety would find plenty to keep them alert.

There were other more rural festivals, which took place in the beautiful outskirts of the city, and would probably be more to the taste of the young Textors, for if those of the town conferred mportance, those of the country were freer from formality and restraint.

In the proximity of Frankfurt lay a large, broad common, distinguished by a sulphur spring.

Photo Frith

THE RÖMER, FRANKFURT

Goethe in his *Hermann and Dorothea* has thus described the place:

By the reverend gloom of tall limes shadily shelter'd
In that place already for many a century rooted,
Lay, with sward well clothed, a broad and spacious green spot
Close to the village, a field for the games of the neighbouring country.
Hollow'd below the ground a well lay, under the lime-trees;
When you the steps went down appear'd there benches of hewn stone
Round the source disposed, where live floods constantly welled forth. WHEWELL.

This pleasant spot was the scene of one of the rural fêtes. Here all the flocks and herds were pastured, whilst the peasants and herdsmen with their sweethearts indulged in dancing, singing, and all the boisterous merrymaking dear to the rustic soul. From out the neighbouring orphanage crept the pale, sickly little ones, to claim a pathetic little share of health and jollity for that one day.

But the crowning fête is that of the vintage. Frankfurt is situated in the midst of the wine country, amongst the rich vineyards of the Rhine valley. The juice of the grape is in the veins of the inhabitants. No one can resist the light gaiety of the wine harvest.

It begins about October 12 and is announced by the public firing of guns. Every man, as he takes up his own private vintage, has a volley fired from his garden. Then the people

shout and shout back to each other, so that the joyous echoes reverberate from the hills around.

All day long the workers are gathering, treading out the grapes and filling the vats with the sweet must. Then at the fall of evening all cease working, while fireworks blaze from all corners and crackle and gleam amongst the hills. The honour of the vintage fills the darkening landscape.

The Textor family had a private vineyard and shared duly in the joyous festival of the vintage: shared also the genial, generous nature of their countrymen the wine-growers.

To give a complete idea of the local influences under which Frau Aja grew up, we must mention one other yearly Frankfurt happening, the breaking up of the ice on the River Main. This was no trivial event, for sometimes, as in 1784, it meant a flood and its dire consequences.

It took place about January, though the exact moment was never known beforehand, a circumtance which made it very exciting.

"The old gentleman has now been ice-bound fifteen weeks," Frau Aja once wrote to a friend. "It is a terrific sight."

And, again, writing to the Duchess Amalia on March 1, 1784, she thus describes that terrible time:

"Our villages were mostly under water. If it

were not for the misfortune, the breaking of the ice was a grand scene—the cracking of the breaking ice—the fearful great masses of ice, which towered themselves up like mountains and rolled over each other with great thunderings—the roaring of the main stream, the thunder of the cannons that bellowed between, to give the town of Maintz the signal that the Main had risen—the tumult of the people, the clatter of the waggons, which had emptied their wares into the merchants' warehouses, altogether it was enough to frighten the stoutest heart."

No wonder that every one, if it happened in the daytime, ran out to see it. On that occasion the water rose in the streets, and even reached the cellars of the houses in the Hirschgraben street, about a quarter of a mile from the river.

We see, then, that Elizabeth Textor's young life suffered in no way from provincial stagnation. Much was always going on in Frankfurt, many men came and went there, and life moved briskly.

She herself thus speaks of her native city: "Frankfurt is a curious place, all who pass through it have to pass back."

In this cheerful environment of family happiness and peace, agreeably blended with social esteem and activity, her character was formed, as she quaintly expresses it:

"My nature never knew stays, but has grown and thriven to its heart's desire, has been able to

spread wide its branches, not like the trees in those dreary pleasure-grounds which are all cut away and mutilated to fit frames; therefore I feel all that is truly good and brave, perhaps more than thousands of my sex."

In 1742, the pageant-loving citizens of Frankfurt witnessed a pageant that might satisfy the keenest sight-seer; this was the coronation of the Emperor Karl VII.

It did not matter that his Imperial Majesty was a mere puppet, set up by the French. He made a romantically effective figure in a scene of splendour. What more was needed?

An elegant, erect gentleman, with pathetic blue eyes, that looked out languidly from under the drooped lids, a man whose sorrows had earned him the sobriquet of "the Unlucky," whose courtesy had won him the hearts of his short time subjects; no wonder that Karl Albert at the moment of his brilliant coronation should have turned the heads of the gentle matrons and maids of his *Kronungstadt*, among these latter being two little maids of eleven and eight, the daughters of the Schultheiss Textor.

Karl was fond of display: so were the Frankfurters; and on this occasion he indulged his own and their taste with an Oriental splendour little less than reckless.

So great was the attraction of the anticipated

spectacle that it allured Wilhelmina, the sister of the great Friedrich, through the bitter February weather, through the snow and slush of the wintry roads, to Frankfurt.

She, the eager, vivacious woman of twenty-seven, accustomed to court shows, would in nowise miss this one, though it necessitated exposure and the discomfort of travelling incognita. She leaves her record of it as *des plus superbes.* What then must it have appeared to the burgher maidens. It excited Johanna, it lulled Elizabeth to romantic dreaming.

Johanna, the tom-boy of eight, expressed her loyalty by one daring stroke. She stood waiting with her party to see the emperor go by, her heart beating with a wild excitement. Suddenly, at the critical moment, when a lull in the loud *Hoch! hoch!* of the crowd gave her a chance, with her whole childish soul and voice she flung one glorious *Vivat* right into the Emperor's carriage.

The emperor, touched and amused by the loyalty of his small subject, looked out kindly and waved his handkerchief. "But," says Elizabeth, "though she boasted much of this, I was secretly persuaded the greeting was for me, for I am sure, when he passed, he looked back at *me.*"

And eleven-year-old Elizabeth began to weave a romance from this slight incident.

All the time of the Emperor's stay, as she, with

the crowd, followed him about from one function to another, she lived through a dream, of which the emperor was the hero, she the heroine.

"I could not believe he knew nothing of it," she says. "Oh, how happy I was all day when he spared me a greeting."

On Good Friday, Karl, dressed in black velvet, went from church to church and knelt among the beggars in the lowest place. This was calculated for effect. At least his girl adorer was duly affected.

"When he raised his lowered head," she says, "I felt as it were a thunder-clap in my breast; when I reached home, the old life had changed for me; it seemed as if bed, chair and table no longer stood in their accustomed places. Night had fallen; lights were brought; I went to the window and looked into the dark streets; and when those in the room talked of the emperor, I trembled like an aspen."

The Emperor was a weary, broken-down, middle-aged gentleman; his little sweetheart, a bright burgher maiden of eleven. Romantic nonsense, truly, yet if it should ever be found worth while to chronicle the spiritual experiences of schoolgirls, such nonsense would form a large portion. Charlotte Brontë adored Wellington. Elizabeth Textor was the mother of a poet.

CHAPTER II

WIFEHOOD

Ein wirthschaftliches Weib—ist das edelst Geschenk
vor einen Biedermann.*

FRAU AJA

AT the age of seventeen, Elizabeth's days of romance were at an end, for she became a wife.

It is quite easy to comprehend how a man like Johann Kaspar Goethe, upright, formal, holding a highly respectable, if somewhat equivocal, position in Frankfurt, should be drawn to the orderly household of the mayor, whose position was so assured.

Herr Goethe, conscious of his somewhat humble origin—his father had been a tailor, and afterwards keeper of the Hôtel Zum Weidenhof, a property which came to him with his second wife—had been only the more ambitious to win for himself recognition in his native city. He therefore, after having travelled for the purpose of improving himself, conceived, on his return, the characteristic idea of offering to undertake the

* A thrifty wife—is the noblest gift for an honest man.

duties of some minor municipal office without emolument, if it could be assigned to him, without the customary formality of a ballot. This offer he made in all singleness of heart, intending to prepare himself faithfully for future service. Such procedure was, however, quite out of form. His request was refused.

Vexed and indignant, conscious of the integrity of his motives, he swore he would never take office at all, and, to make it impossible, he managed to obtain the honorary title of imperial councillor, a title belonging to the Schultheiss and senior Sheriffs, and no one having once borne it, since it conferred a rank equal to theirs, could take an inferior post. He probably had little difficulty in attaining his end. He took an active and conspicuous part in arranging the elaborate ceremonial for the coronation of Karl VII.; doubtless the honorary rank was conferred in recognition of his energetic service at that time.

Here we have the key-note to the character of the worthy man: his high integrity, his high self-valuation, his stubborn tenacity of purpose.

It is characteristic, though a little amusing, that the same prosaic motive induced him to woo the eldest daughter of the Schultheiss, for by marrying into the family of the chief magistrate he doubly secured the impossibility of holding an inferior office.

Yet this surely was not his sole motive; formal —nay, even pedagogic—though he was, he had a loving heart. It is quite comprehensible that he should be fascinated by the bright humour, the steady cheerfulness of Elizabeth, quite comprehensible that, finding her a willing pupil, whose desire for improvement met his for imparting knowledge, and probably not indifferent to her dainty dress, he should gradually come to think of her as a desirable helpmate, just as the serious Milton was captivated by a bright, quiet maiden of seventeen, and, with more warmth than wisdom, wooed and wedded her.

It is not quite so easy to understand what induced a clever, high-spirited girl of seventeen to accept this staid bachelor of thirty-eight, who lived with his old mother in a large rambling house.

He certainly had good qualities, he had good looks, he was a man of considerable culture and information, he was well-to-do and bore the title of Rath. We can imagine that the intelligent girl would listen with interest to the anecdotes of travel he was so pleased to relate, she would also perhaps not be entirely indifferent to his position; but how did Herr Goethe, precise, middle-aged, pedantic, manage to satisfy her romance?

For explanation we must again turn to the scene between Olimpia and Elmire already quoted. Olimpia says:

"We took husbands, when we hardly knew what an assembly was or anything about money; before we were aware, paff! we had husbands."

That doubtless was the explanation.

Rath * Goethe's many advantages would weigh with the father of four daughters. When Karl VII. offered to ennoble Textor, the shrewd old Schultheiss answered that he preferred that his daughters should remain *bürgerliche*. "For," said he, "since they are poor, if they should be ennobled, neither a nobleman nor a burgher would wed them."

He was quite willing to spare one of the four to such an eligible suitor as Rath Goethe.

Alas! there was no room for romance. And we would so fain have believed the story of courtship told by the *gute, verständige Mütter* of *Hermann and Dorothea* to be Frau Aja's own.

But the good dame thereat broke quickly into the converse:
"Truly, son, thou art right, we elders gave the example.
For we made our choice not in days of rejoicing:
Rather it was that hour of misery knit us together,
'Twas on a Monday morn—well know I; the previous day was
That of the terrible fire, when so much of the city was burnt down;
Twenty years it is now; just as to-day, 'twas a Sunday;
Hot and dry was the season and most of the water was dried up,

* Councillor. It is customary in German to assume the title.

All the townsfolk a-walking were gone, in their holiday clothing,
Scatter'd about in the villages near and the mills and the gardens,
Then at the end of the town the fire broke out; and the burning
Quick ran all the street long and caused a draught with its blazing,
Then were the barns all burnt that held the garnered harvest
Burnt were the streets as far as the market; the house of my father
Here close by was consumed and this along with it perisht.
Not far off fled we, I sat the desolate night through
There on the green outside, and watched the chests and the bedding.
Sleep fell on me at last; and when the cool morning,
Which before sunrise is felt, had woke me from slumber,
Then was my heart right sad; but soon the glorious sun rose
Brighter than ever before, and shed hope in my bosom.
Quick then I rose on my feet, I thought I would look at the ground plots
Where the dwellings had stood, and see if the poultry was rescued,
Which I had tended and loved; for my thoughts were the thoughts of a child still.
And as over the ruins I clomb of the house and the homestead
Smoking still, and saw the perisht and waste habitation,
Thou camest up, on the opposite side the ruin exploring,
For thy horse in his stable was buried; the smouldering timbers
Lay on the spot in the rubbish, but nought could be seen of the beast there.
So then face to face stood we, both mourning and thoughtful;
For the wall was destroyed which our two homes had divided.
Then didst thou take hold of my hand and say to me kindly;
'What dost thou in this place, Lieschen? Thy feet will be scorched,

For the rubbish is hot, it singes my boots though they stout are.'
And then thou tookest me up and carried me out through the courtyard
Of the houses. The door was standing yet and the doorway
Just as it stands even now ; of the whole that alone had escaped.
And thou set'st me down and gav'st me a kiss, though I would not ;
And then didst thou say with kind and significant accents ;
See, my house is down, stay here and help me to build it :
I in return will help thy father when he is a builder,
Yet understood I not, till thou to my father and mother
Spakest, and then was the vow pronounced of the happy betrothal.
Still to this day in my thoughts the half-burnt beams I remember
Joyful, and love to see the glorious sun at his rising ;
For that day gave a husband to me ; and the very same time that
Gave me the son of my youth was the time of the utter destruction."

This translation by Whewell, for want of a better, will convey the simple, vivid pictures and the story; but would that the author of *Evangelene* had rendered the Homeric boom and beauty of the rhythm.

Although we know that the poet was thinking of his mother when he wrote every line of that perfect domestic poem, his tender tribute to her age—for she tells him in a letter that she carries about the copy he has sent her, as a mother cat carries her kitten—we are reluctantly obliged to class it rather with *Dichtung** than *Wahrheit*.†

* Poetry. † Fact.

GOETHEGEBURTSHAUS BEFORE REBUILDING
(After drawing by Reiffenstein)

In whatever way the marriage was brought about, we know that it took place on August 20, 1748, and that the ceremony was performed by Fresenius, the confessor and friend of the family. We even know that the text of the sermon was 1 Tim. 4–8. Unfortunately, we know nothing of the girl-bride's thoughts and feelings.

Of her life and home after the marriage, we are happily able to form a very clear picture—the home that was to be hers for forty-seven years, where she was to bear children, and part with them; where after thirty-four years of married life her husband died; where she spent thirteen years of widowhood, where princes and princesses, statesmen and poets delighted to sit at her round table.

The house to which Rath Goethe took his young Räthin—for such was now her dignity, according to German etiquette—was in a street in the old town, called the Grosse Hirsch Graben (Great Stag Ditch), though both stags and ditch had long since vanished. It was an old rambling building, which had once been two houses, of picturesque exterior, though somewhat grotesque and ill-proportioned. In some places the floor-levels of the two dwellings had not corresponded, and had had to be patched together: in one portion a tower-like staircase united the rooms. There were dark recesses and many dusky

corners, such as children would hurry past at twilight. In fact, it was not exactly the kind of abode a cheerful young housewife, just starting wedded life, would select.

But the Frau Rath was of those who, when things cannot be cured, endure them. She let her own cheery nature dominate her surroundings rather than allow them to depress her. Her son tells us she kept even the walls of the old mansion in good repair and clean. Moreover, there were good points and pleasant places about it, to make amends for its many drawbacks. To begin with, there was a good library, the very pride of Herr Goethe's heart. It was probably there that the wife of seventeen received the lessons in writing, clavichord playing and singing of Italian songs which the husband of thirty-eight thought fit to bestow.

The contrast between her bright girlishness and his sedate gravity made his attitude towards her somewhat paternal—not to say pedagogic. Teaching was with him a passion. She, willing to please him and at the same time improve herself, fell in with his humour, and worked industriously, attaining considerable proficiency in Italian, while clavichord playing was then and always a keen pleasure to her.

But her handwriting—her spelling! How was it that her tutor-husband—careful, precise man-

of-law that he was—did not manage to teach her to spell and write?

A friend writing to her says: "You have an abominable hand, a thorough cat's-paw. I do not mean that hand that applauds in the theatre, but your handwriting; it is abominable and illegible."

With spelling (*Buchstabieren*) it fared still worse. Elizabeth says in a letter, "spelling (*Bustawiren*)* and straight writing do not belong to my talent. . . . You must excuse it," she adds mischievously, "the fault is the schoolmaster's."

His pupil has a way of introducing quite unnecessary consonants: she writes *niemandt* for *niemand*, *Printz* for *Prinz*, *Sambstag* for *Samstag*. We hardly recognise *Märchen* in *Mährgen*, *Thierchen* in *Thirgen*. Why does she call the musician *Haydn*, *Heiden* and put a *g* at the end of *Orleans?*

We must not, however, forget that even England had no Johnson's Dictionary at that period; it was, in fact, just then being slowly and painfully evolved by its suffering, indomitable compiler.

These lessons, we fear, could not have passed entirely without friction, for the master was exacting, his pupil a little quick-tempered. Indeed, in after years, when his pupil was not wife but daughter, the lesson hours led to secret revolt and passionate heartburning.

* Note her quaint spelling.

But we have it from Elizabeth herself that she knew how to manage him in many ways, and how to mollify his severity. No doubt she used the irresistible charm of her great, childish, brown eyes, which sparkled with perfect enjoyment of life. She was by no means her husband's inferior in intellect. She possessed a taste for good literature and a fair knowledge of it. Poetry was far more instinctive to her nature than to his : for him poetry and rhyme were synonyms—nay, verse without rhyme was as a red rag to a bull,—he abhorred it.

Just then German poetry was at low-water mark. For want of better, the mother of the man who was so richly to supply that need, must be content with such vapid rigmaroles as the *Luise* of Voss.

Much of Frau Goethe's time would probably be spent in the "bird-cage." The "bird-cage" was the spacious ground floor, peculiar to several houses in the *Hirsh Graben*. A portion near the door was divided from the street only by a wooden trellis ; it was locally known as the *Geräms*, the "frame."

Here it was that the ladies of the household sat, with their sewing and—being German ladies—of course their knitting. Here they prepared their salads and performed other domestic duties.

The *Geräms* was a pleasant place. The con-

tact with the life of the street and with the open air gave a sense of freedom. Neighbours passing outside stopped to chat, or at any rate to say a few words with those within; the dullness of domestic indoor life was relieved; in fact, in fine weather the prim German street assumed somewhat the air of easy-going Italy.

A pretty old lady, fragile almost as a spirit, Herr Goethe's mother, shared the young wife's household cares and pleasures.

This gentle, kindly dame and her young daughter-in-law were drawn together by their mutual interests and affections. The younger Frau Goethe took tender care of the elder. The poet tells us, in his autobiography, that he remembered the latter dressed always in spotless white.

To continue the description of the house. From the back, especially from the upper story, there was a very agreeable view over gardens, right away to the city walls. In those days many families had gardens outside the city gates. The garden appertaining to the Goethe *Stammhaus* lay before the Friedberger Gate, not far from Elizabeth's old home.

To Elizabeth a pleasing outlook was a necessity; like all of poetic temperament, bricks and mortar oppressed her. Writing to her son long years after, when at last she changed her abode, she

made a pleasant outlook of second importance in her requirements. She must, she tells him, first, be near her friends; secondly, she must have a view. A favourite room of hers was the one they called the "garden room"; here she kept her flowers, making a window-garden. Hence, also, the outlook was over gardens, over the town wall and ramparts away to a fair plain beyond, through which, about half a mile distant, flowed the winding stream of the Nidda.

From the window of this room, some few years later, a little boy loved to gaze, the fair scene rousing in his small soul, not, he says, exactly sadness, but a longing (*Sehnsucht*).

Flügel! Flügel! um zu fliegen
Ueber Berg und Thal
Flügel, um mein Herz zu wiegen
Auf des Morgens Strahl.

Flügel, übers Meer zu schweben
Mit dem Morgenroth,
Flügel, Flügel übers Leben,
Ueber Grab und Tod.*

* Wings! Wings! to fly
O'er mountain and stream
My heart should lie
On a glad sunbeam.

Wings! Wings for flight,
O'er the ocean wave,
In the Dawn's red light,
O'er Life o'er the Grave.

RÜCKERT.

VIEW FROM FRAU AJA'S GARDEN-ROOM
(After drawing by Reiffenstein)

Here he watched the sunsets and the storms.

Such was Elizabeth's new home. Here she lived, a cheerful, kind, brisk presence, caring for the comfort of her two companions, her grave husband and his frail mother, and here at the end of a year her first-born son saw the light.

CHAPTER III

MOTHERHOOD

Von Vater hab' ich die Statur,
Des Lebens ernstes Führen;
Von Mütterchen die Frohnatur,
Die Lust zu fabuliren.*

GOETHE.

YES, before the year was out, Elizabeth, sitting in the "bird-cage" with her gentle companion, had much dainty sewing to do on tiny garments, for life was about to become very sweet for her. On August 28, 1749, she passed through an interval of mortal dread, ended by the words uttered in the voice of the elder Frau Goethe, "Elizabeth, *he lives!*"

Then the very fullness and glory of life began for the young mother of eighteen. After half a century had elapsed, she thus wrote of that moment:

"Then did my motherly heart awake and has

* From father have I my stature,
My zest for earnest living,
From little mother my gay nature,
My love of story-telling!

lived since then in continual enthusiasm until this hour. Must I not thankfully adore Providence for that life, which then hung only on a breath, but which is now anchored in thousands of hearts, and is to me the one life."

We imagine her walking up and down the "bird-cage," with the soft lulling movement dedicated to babies, whispering sweet nonsense against the baby cheek, catching the tossing baby hands with kisses, beginning that delightful harmony of love and friendship which ended only with her life. "I and my Wolfgang," she says, "have always held fast to each other; we were young together."

We seem to see her every now and again, kneeling by her gentle companion, calling on her to share her treasure, her *Hätschelhans*,* such was the long, endearing name she bestowed on her wee baby. We can see the white spirit-like face of the grandmother bending close to that of the healthy, pretty mother over the small struggling bundle.

By-and-by she would lay it in the large walnut-wood cradle, richly inlaid with ebony and ivory, and the two happy women would concoct between them that wondrous baptismal robe, worked with stripes and flowers, the white crape cap adorned with silver sprigs, which some sixty

* Not easily translated "Pet Hans."

years afterwards was still carefully preserved in the great clothes-press and occasionally brought out by Frau Aja to be shown to her favoured friends.

After the birth of her first-born, Elizabeth knew both joy and sorrow. If she drank to the full of the sweet cup of motherhood, she also tasted its bitterness.

The stork often visited the Goethe house. The little ones were often told :

What claps in the house so loud?—hark! hark!
I believe, I believe, it is the stork!
That *was* the stork! So, children, be still,
And listen to what I will tell.
Out he has flown, but has brought you a brother,
But, alas, I'm afraid he has bitten your mother.

She lies now ill, but is full of joy,
Nor heeds the pain for the love of the boy.
The little brother, so sweet and small,
Has brought with him sugar-plums for you all—
But never a one shall taste a sweet,
That cannot be still and most discreet.

In December 1750 a daughter, Cornelia, was born, after two years another boy, after two more another girl.

Then Elizabeth went through the hardest of all trials—she had to see her baby die; but very soon another little girl came to take the lost one's place, only, however, for three years; then it, too, slipped away. Then came a third boy. This,

her last baby, she nursed for a year, then yielded it also to death.

We have no record of the young mother's suffering, only we know she bravely conquered suffering, that these trials left her always bright and cheerful, helping those who formed her household to be so too.

Probably trial strengthened the bond between husband and wife, for Johann Goethe, undemonstrative though he was, had a warm heart: his wife, and the children that remained, were very dear to him. His son says of him: "My father belongs to those natures who, although they feel deeply, consider every expression of feelings a weakness, and conceal them with an assumed strength."

Frau Aja's little flock was thus reduced to three. The eldest boy, Wolfgang, her Hätschelhans, was the darling and pride of her heart, for to her discerning eye, that genius was already apparent which was eventually to give to German poetry "a local habitation and a name," nay, to do for Germany far more—to rouse in her sons that spirit of self-development which now bids fair to make them the very pioneers of progress.

Her daughter, Cornelia, was a clever, sensitive child, the constant companion of her brother in study and play-time. The youngest boy, Hermann Jacob, a delicate, quiet, somewhat peevish little

fellow, does not seem to have shared the vivacious activity of the other two, and before long paid the tribute, at that time almost always exacted by smallpox from a household, and disappeared from the family circle.

Frau Goethe had the true secret of making her little ones happy; young herself, she shared their pleasures with a zeal equal to their own, whilst her gentle tact smoothed over the less easy relation between the children and the exacting father.

Of this period of her life we get a clear sketch from the hand of her Hätschelhans himself. He tells us:

"The old house with its corners and dark recesses was well qualified to arouse fear and trembling. Unfortunately in those days the disciplinarian maxim still prevailed, that children must early be cured of all dread of the Invisible and Unknown, that they must be accustomed to the Awful. Therefore we children were made to sleep alone, and when we found this impossible, and slinking softly out of bed sought the companionship of servants and maids, our father placed himself in our way, dressed in his dressing-gown turned inside out, a complete disguise to our young eyes: thus he scared us back to our resting-place. The harm this worked may easily be imagined. How can one be freed from terror by being hemmed in by a double fright? My mother knew better:

she attained her aim by rewards. It was the season of pears, and she promised a rich feast in the morning if we conquered the fears of night. She thus gained her end, to the satisfaction of both parties."

The young housewife now no longer went about her household tasks unaccompanied: little pattering feet followed her, bright eyes looked out for good things and took furtive peeps into her well-filled store-cupboards when she opened the doors.

"Few joys of life," confesses Hätschelhans, "have equalled my feeling when she called me to help fetch something out, and her kindness, or my own craft, rewarded me with a few preserved plums. The heaped-up treasures worked on my fancy: even the marvellous perfume breathed out by those many spices made my mouth water, so that whenever I was near, when the door was open I sniffed in the delicious atmosphere."

Now the "bird-cage" became the scene of merry childish pranks, for if the mother loved this cheerful portion of the house, the children gloried in the trellised connection with the outer world.

It was here that Hätschelhans made his first acquaintance with the sinister personage who "finds mischief for idle hands to do," whose portrait he was one day to paint in such lurid colours. The manner of their introduction was in this wise.

The boy is alone in the "bird-cage," playing with his toys. In his hand he holds a tiny dish, one of a set of tiny pots and dishes, playthings which had been been bought for the children at the late fair. The archfinder of mischief whispers a naughty suggestion in the little ear, "Why not drop it through the trellis? What a lovely noise it would make!" Out goes the dish; the resulting noise is very agreeable, but by no means sufficing. Several more tiny plates and dishes follow: the noise is greatly improved.

The little imp claps his chubby hands as he peeps out at the heap of fragments, and he glances up, fearfully, to see that no one is looking. But three somebodies are looking, not only looking but enjoying, three mischievous somebodies, three wicked neighbours, who live opposite: the brothers Ochsenstein are applauding the fun.

"More, more!" cry these wicked ones.

There are no more. All the toy plates and dishes lie broken there below. Then does that crafty adviser, who is always ready with suggestion, remind the small sinner that at the recent crockery fair his mother has set up the household with crockery.

He looks round, no one is in the "bird-cage," those wicked brothers opposite are making signs,

clamouring for more of the delightful clatter. He opens the door, the house is quite quiet, he darts into the kitchen : that too is empty. He seizes on as many plates as he can carry ; out they go ! Oh, that is something like a noise ! The applause from over the way is uproarious.

Then backwards and forwards runs the excited little rascal ; plate after plate, dish after dish adds to the clatter, the heap of fragments, and the renown. Never was such a glorious noise. The future poet was tasting the first joy of his own melody and the applause of an admiring audience.

Frau Aja, because she was little more than a girl herself, and because she was prone to mirth, in spite of her dismay at this holocaust of household goods, was fain to join the contagious laughter of the naughty urchin and his wicked coadjutors.

So the story became a family joke.

Hätschelhans distinctly tells us he had

Von Mütterchen die Frohnatur,
Die Lust zu fabuliren ! *

The joyous temperament of his *Little Mother* sparkles through the whole of her correspondence.

"Would to God," she writes in 1793 to her son, "that I could make all men joyful and happy, then things would indeed go well with me."

* From little mother my gay nature,
My love of story-telling.

A friend bears the following testimony that Frau Aja's wish was answered:

"It was unanimously resolved that no family festival should be given without her, so much had they perceived her good influence; they wondered how she can win hearts so quickly; only because she enjoys heartily, and thereby wakes the hearts of all around her."

Frau Aja tells us:

"Merry folk I always like. . . . Were I a ruling princess, I would make a law like Julius Cæsar that right merry faces must be seen at my court, for as a rule they belong to good people with easy consciences; but hypocrites, who always look down, have something of Cain about them, and I fear them. Luther represents God as saying to Cain, 'Why has thy countenance* fallen?' but in the original it is, "Why dost thou hang thy head?'"

To her son she writes:

"Ach! there are many joys still on our dear God's earth, only one must know how to find them—they are to be found certainly, and the little ones are not to be despised. How many joys are trodden under foot—whilst people stare upwards and don't note what lies at their feet! There's another brew from Frau Aja's kitchen."

Such passages abound in her letters. Indeed,

* Warum verstellen sich deiner Geberde?—*Luther's translation of the Bible.*

if canonisation were to be won by cheerfulness, Frau Aja would have worn a bright nimbus.

Her own and her boy's delight *zu fabuliren*, she thus confirms:

"I never was tired of telling, as he never was of listening. Air, fire, water, and earth I represented as princesses; and to all that happened in Nature I gave a meaning in which I soon believed more firmly than did my little listeners. As we thought of roads which led from star to star and that we should one day inhabit stars and thought of the great spirits we should meet up there, none of us was more eager for the hours of story-telling with the children than I. Yes; I longed to go on with our little tales of imagination, and an invitation that deprived me of such an evening made me cross. There I sat and there Wolfgang held me with his large black eyes; and when the fate of some favourite was not according to his fancy, I saw the angry veins swell on his forehead. I saw him gulp down his tears. He often burst in with 'But, mother, the princess mustn't marry the nasty tailor even if he does kill the giant.' If I came to a stop for the night, and put off the catastrophe till next night, I was certain that by then he would have arranged it all for himself, and so, when my fancy failed, it was richly supplemented by his. Then next evening I made things happen according to his plan, and said, 'You have guessed it, that's what happened.' He was all fire and flame, one could see his little heart beating underneath his dress!

His grandmother, who made a great pet of him, was the confidante of all his ideas as to how the story would turn out. She repeated these to me, and I turned the story according to these hints, so there was a little diplomatic secret between us which we never disclosed. I had the pleasure of continuing my story to the delight and surprise of my hearers, and Wolfgang saw with shining eyes the fulfilment of his own conceptions and listened with fascinated approval."

This picture is a highly intensified one of what goes on in many a nursery. We know that the story-teller, looking into those shining eyes, made for herself yet other stories of fame and glory, in which her little listener played a more real part. How great was to be that part she could not foresee, yet she was not working quite unconsciously, since she exclaims: "How often is there in children a germ of the beautiful and the good, but alas! it is suppressed."

How fully the boy assimilated this imaginative food we see by that long fanciful romance, *The New Paris*, with which he regaled his schoolmates and which through the repetition, often demanded, so etched itself in his memory that he could conjure it before his imagination at the age of sixty-three.

The large back room appropriated to their grandmother was for the children a paradise, such as only a doting grandmother knows how

to make. There were all manner of treasures, all kinds of cakes and "sweeties" for the round mouths, in fact the spirit-like old lady spoilt them as only a grandmother is allowed to do.

Even when she became ill, they still played round her bed. Her last treat for them was the now world-famous puppet-show, which takes an almost absurdly prominent place in the earlier chapters of *Wilhelm Meister*.

Knowing as we do the poet's propensity for introducing the smallest incidents of his own life into his works, for he tells us : "And so began a habit from which I never deviated during my whole life, namely, of turning all those things which pleased or pained or in any way occupied me into a picture, a poem"—knowing this, we may safely take the scene between Wilhelm and his mother to have passed between Frau Aja and her son. The mother says, after scolding Wilhelm for going too often to the theatre :

"'How often I reproach myself for having ever given you that hateful puppet-show as a Christmas present twelve years ago, which first gave you a taste for the theatre.'

"'Don't blame the puppet-show, don't repent your love and kindness. Those were the first happy moments I spent in the great new empty house; I see it all again. I remember how strangely I felt when, after receiving our Christmas gifts, we were told to sit down before a door

that led into another room. It opened but not as usual for going in and out; the passage was filled with an unexpected wonder, a high portal had been built covered by a curtain. We first stood all at a distance, and as our curiosity grew greater, wondering what it could be shining and rattling behind the somewhat transparent curtain, we were told to sit down and be patient.

"'So we all sat down and remained quiet; a whistle gave the signal and the curtain rose, revealing a very red scene in the temple.'"

The story of this wondrous puppet-play was that of David and Goliath.

"I remember well," Wilhelm says in another place, "that I could not sleep, that I wanted so much to tell it all, that I asked so many questions, I would hardly let the nurse, who put us to bed, go. The next morning, alas! the magic stage had vanished again, the mysterious veil had been taken away and we easily passed from one room to the other. My brother and sister played with their toys, but I wandered about, it seemed so impossible that there should be only the doorway, where yesterday had been such enchantment. Ach! no lover seeking a lost love could be more unhappy than I was. My only wish was to see the play again, I begged my mother to allow it and she chose the opportunity for asking my father. But her trouble was in vain; he asserted that only rare pleasures were valued, neither children nor grown people cared for the good things they had every day."

The mother says :

"I don't wonder you remember the thing so well, for you took the greatest interest in it. I recollect how you purloined the book from me and learnt the whole play off by heart. I found it out one evening when you made a Goliath and David of wax, and made them harangue each other and at last gave the giant a knock and sticking his shapeless head on a large pin fastened it to the hand of the little David with wax. I felt such motherly delight at your good memory and pathetic little oration, that I made up my mind to let you have the whole wooden troop."

This is all very trivial, yet, for those who are interested in human development, very suggestive.

The brother and sister played with their toys as before, the glamour of those mimic scenes had for them passed "into the light of common day." It was otherwise with the future poet ; he wanders aimlessly about, the magic gate of imagination had been opened for him ; for one moment he had caught a glimpse of the wondrous land he was one day to explore and conquer, and that glimpse was not again forgotten.

Many years after, when Frau Goethe at last left her home, she came on the puppet-show amongst her lumber, and writes to her son to ask what shall be done with it. After many wanderings it at last came to rest in the Goethe house.

A pretty domestic festival, characteristic at once of German custom and the childhood of genius, may aptly find insertion here.

On a lovely spring morning, February 19, the children of the Goethe household came into their garden carrying between them, with conscious importance, a green settee. This they gravely placed under the young pear-tree, which had been planted by their grandfather, the Schultheiss Textor, on the memorable occasion of Hätschelhans' birth, and which now on this glad spring morning was a mass of delicate pink blossom.

The settee was gay with ribbons and flowers, for was it not the much-loved *Fable-seat*, because, enthroned thereon, Frau Aja was wont to tell those delicious fables and fairy-tales, the delight of old and young. And this was Frau Aja's birthday.

By-and-by guest and relative began to arrive, and when all were assembled, Hätschelhans, dressed as a shepherd, with a scrip from which hung a scroll with letters of gold, a garland of green on his curls, stepped under the pear-tree, and, with all due gravity, made an address to that settee as to the "seat of beautiful fables," the well-beloved. Very pretty he looked, the handsome little fellow under the pear blossoms as he spoke his oration with the utmost confidence and fire of expression.

The second act of the little drama consisted of blowing soap-bubbles into the clear air. These, caught by the light breezes, floated about in the sunlight round the *Fable-seat*, and as often as a bubble sank down on to it and burst, all the children cried with one accord, "A tale, a tale." When a bubble after floating a second burst in mid-air, they shouted, "The tale bursts."

The neighbours in the adjoining gardens peeped over the walls and hedges and took the liveliest interest in the little festival and the boy actor, so that by evening all the town talked of it.

The town soon forgot it: the mother never. She took it in after-time as an omen of her boy's future fame.

CHAPTER IV

THE GOETHEGEBURTHAUS *

O Hausz ! was ist du vor Heil wiederfahren ! ! ! †
Frau Aja's letter to the Duchess Amalia.

IN the sixth year of Elizabeth's married life, her husband's gentle old mother died, leaving her son a goodly heritage.

The *Goethegeburthaus* as it is now proudly styled, had been the property of the old lady, and, during her lifetime, her son had considerately refrained from making any alterations in the home. This reveals to us his true kindness and thorough right-mindedness. When, however, there was no longer occasion to spare her feelings, there came about a complete turning topsy-turvy of the orderly household.

Herr Goethe rebuilt his house from the top downwards. The reason why he took this original method of procedure is explained by his son in the autobiography.

In old Frankfurt, as in many English towns,

* Birthplace of Goethe.

† O house ! what a blessing is vouchsafed to thee !

the dwelling-houses of an earlier epoch had been built with overhanging stories, so that space was gained in the upper rooms at the expense of light and air to the street below; but shortly before the period of which we write, a law had been enacted in Frankfurt, forbidding this arrangement in all future building, there must be no overhanging, higher than the first floor.

Herr Goethe wished to rebuild his house, but had no intention of reducing his space, therefore he had recourse to a subterfuge, employed by several of his neighbours before him.

By propping up the highest story and building downwards, his alterations might be made to assume the character of repairs, rather than of a new erection.

It is easy to imagine what an upset this must have caused in his wife's domestic arrangements; one can also easily picture the delight of the children at the bustle and amusement ensuing. No wonder Frau Goethe was anxious when her five-year-old son scrambled about the beams and scaffolding, for the father, with his usual obstinacy, insisted on keeping the little ones at home in the dismantled house, nay, even tried to carry on the lessons, although the young heads were wild with the excitement and novelty of what was going on.

Only when the roof was in progress and the

rain came in on their beds would he at last consent to let them stay with friends and continue their studies for a time at school.

If the Räthin loved order, the Rath loved it more, and both must have rejoiced when the family once again assembled in the now most comfortable though less picturesque dwelling. The children were delighted to find the beloved "bird-cage," the *Geräms*, still intact; though no longer, perhaps, quite so convenient for "shying" out household crockery, since the wooden trellis had given place to a strong iron framework.

It may interest readers to know how Frau Aja's house was arranged. Her life was essentially domestic. Most of its joys and sorrows had for background, the blue, the yellow, or the picture room, the large hall, or the wide staircase which connected all the stories with convenient facility.[1]

The exterior of the house has been made familiar by numerous photographs. It is a substantial edifice of most simple design; there is about it no attempt at decoration, no meretricious ornament to disfigure rather than adorn. Yet it is not without a certain comeliness in its air of achieved purpose; it recalls the Herr Rath himself, bearing the impress of his careful thought: it suggests him in its straightness of line, in its

regularity of division, in its somewhat aggressive width and abutment.

There is no front garden, no area railing; the wall rises at once from the pavement, so that the three door-steps encroach somewhat on the public way; the ironwork of the *Geräms* bows out from the façade in a full curve; each of the four stories overhangs the street farther than the one below, testifying visibly to the conservatism of the builder.

It is a house that quietly but firmly demands respect, but makes no false pretension.

From all Frankfurters it has respect, from all Germany, nay, from all the civilised world something beyond respect. If the exterior is dominated by Herr Goethe's character, the interior will ever be loved for Frau Aja's sake.

We stand on the doorstep before the door, over which we notice two symbols—a lyre and a star—symbols of poetry and fame. How they came there, or what was their original import, we know not. What they shall mean now and to all future time, as long as the Goethegeburthaus exists, we know full well.

Entering, we find ourselves in a large hall, that occupies the whole central portion of the house from front to rear. On the left of the entrance is the so-called blue room, on the right the yellow room, rooms that were to become of high im-

portance in Frau Aja's home. At the time we write of, they were merely well-furnished burgher rooms, no doubt giving their young mistress much satisfaction by their pretty newness, though she little dreamed that they were to become familiar with the presence of princes and princesses, that honour was to be done her in them, beyond her wildest imaginings.

Behind the blue room is the Frau's large well-supplied kitchen in close communication with the dining-room, and in the latter was Frau Aja's round table—eventually to become almost as celebrated as King Arthur's own.

In the rear are the servants' offices, including the spacious washhouse so necessary in a German household, where the family "wash" of linen takes place, not weekly, but once a year, in May or June. To the right is a courtyard or small garden.

The central hall extends behind the yellow room to the right-hand limit of the house, and from the hall a wide staircase, with balusters of wrought iron, ornamented with interlaced monograms, J. C. G. and C. E. G., ascends from story to story, interrupted at each by an ample landing. So large are these landings that in the warmer months the inmates were accustomed to use them as rooms, so that the family life had free intercourse from top to bottom of the large house, an

arrangement which had advantages, and, as we shall see, disadvantages.

On the next floor, we find three rooms, occupying the front of the house ; a large room in the middle, flanked on either side by smaller ones.

Still a story higher we come again to three rooms in front, but here they are of more equal size. The centre one is the picture room, that on the right Frau Rath's room, that on the left the Herr Rath's.

The Frau Rath's drawing-room was furnished with English furniture, probably Chippendale or Sheraton, and the walls were papered with a blue Chinese pattern.

The Herr Rath's room has a window in the side wall. The purpose of this window is highly characteristic of the master of this well-ordered household. From it may be had a view up the street, so that he could see if any of his household returned too late at night, for the Herr Rath was an austere man, who would tolerate no late hours, no evening meetings of his maids with followers, no slinking home of men-servants from late carouses. His eye kept watch, if strictly, yet with justice.

Behind the Frau Rath's room we come upon the parents' bedroom, looking into the courtyard. This is the room where Germany's noblest poet first saw the light.

Blue appears to have been a favourite colour with Frau Aja, for the hangings of her bed were also of a chequered blue pattern.

On the next story are numerous rooms, perhaps now the most interesting in the house, the simply furnished rooms, wherein took place so many mental phases of developing genius. The passion of first love—the morbid fancies of Werther—the noble inceptions of Götz and Egmont—the emotions incident on the call to Weimar and wider life.

A passage from *Wilhelm Meister* helps us to an amusing and vivid glimpse of the decoration of the rebuilt house. Wilhelm complains to his mother:

"Had we not enough room in the old house? Was there any need to build a new one? Does not my father yearly spend quite a large sum in decorating the rooms? These silk hangings, this English furniture, are they not useless? Couldn't we be contented with commoner? I must say, at any rate it gives me quite a disagreeable impression, these striped walls, these flowers repeated a hundred times, these flourishes, baskets and figures. They look to me," he finishes mischievously, "just like the drop-scene at a theatre."

What would the Herr Rath have said to that mischievous comparison? Let us hope he never heard it, for at the time of the rebuilding of the

house the son was a small boy of five, the figures, flowers, and baskets, if they impressed his young fancy disagreeably, did so without his consciousness. Many of us can remember odious wall-paper patterns that have teased us in nursery days when we were too young to formulate our distaste or even to put it into words.

There was no garden worth mentioning attached to the house, yet the members of the Goethe family were true lovers of gardens. The *Gartenhaus* of the poet in the park at Weimar has become famous. The garden belonging to the Goethe house was as many of the gardens of the houses of old Frankfurt, away, close to the city walls, near by the Friedberger Gate.

It was no ordinary garden, but partook somewhat of the character of a vineyard, for Herr Goethe's mother had been sometime proprietress of the Willow Inn. When Frau Aja in 1794 removed to another house, she, in a description of the contents of her cellar, mentions "three butts of the year '47 from our garden, which have gone bad."

In a letter to her son she writes: "The chestnuts are not good this year; they keep step with the grapes in ripeness and goodness—the grapes are not ripe; they are not worth eating. If I do not send any, you must scold Mother Nature—not me."

The Mother of Goethe

We are quite satisfied in accepting the following description taken from *Hermann and Dorothea*, since it accords, in places, almost word for word with that given in *Wahrheit und Dichtung*. The translation is Whewell's, slightly altered. The housewife is the mother of the poem—is, in fact, Frau Aja.

The garden that far to the walls of the city
Reacht, and through as she past, rejoiced in the manifold growth that
Flourisht around ; and set to rights the props that supported
Branches laden with apples and bending boughs of the pear-tree,
And pickt worms from the widespread leaves of the vigorous colewort,
For no step is idly made by the provident housewife,
And so came she at last to the end of the far-reaching garden,
E'en to the arbour, of woodbine woven.

And again :

The gate was ajar, that out of the arbour
By an especial grace, through the wall of the city, the grandsire
Had in the old time broken, the honoured Burgomaster ;
And so over the deep dry foss she easily wended
Where hard on the road, the vineyard well paslisaded
Rose with a straighter path, its earthy slope to the sun turned.
That also she mounted, and joyed to see as she did so
Clusters swelling that scarce could hide in the shade of the green leaves.
Shady the walk in the midst and overarcht with the vine boughs.
Where the path was of steps, of unhewn pieces of wood made,
Where the choice grapes hung, the Muscadel, the Gut-adel ;

Reddening purple their hue of largest sizes the berries,
Planted all with care, to deck the dessert of the guests meant:
But the rest of the slope was cloth'd with separate wine-plants
Bearing the smaller grape of which the excellent wine comes.

WHEWELL.

The arrangement of the house afforded much occupation of a pleasurable kind to the several members of the family. The father was in good spirits at seeing his design achieved; the vexations caused by dilatory and careless workpeople were things of the past; all that remained to be done could be done by wife, children, and servants under his supervision.

Gradually he brought his valuable library into order, then arranged his pictures. It does not appear that his artistic taste was very elevated, but it pleased him to patronise art and artists.

He had a family picture painted by Seekatz, a local artist of some note. The following description of it will show that it rivalled the celebrated one of the Primrose family.

In a pastoral landscape, with a nondescript ruin in the foreground, composed of three meaningless columns and a sepulchral urn, a place most unlikely to be frequented by a German burgher's family, sat the Frau Rath, apparently talking eagerly (this at least was true to life): beside her stood the Herr Rath apparently listening (let us hope this was also true). Behind

them appeared their two living children, Wolfgang, engaged in tying a red ribbon round a lamb's throat, Cornelia watching him perform this improbable feat. And—strange taste!—in the distance was seen a group of winged cupids, or rather cherubim, representing the souls of the children that had died. Surely the incongruity of composition deserves high admiration—father and mother in knee-breeches and hooped petticoat; Grecian ruins, and cherubs!

Forty years after, when Frau Goethe moved from the house, she wrote to ask her son what was to be done with this work of art. "The frame and the board for painting over are at least worth something," she says: from which we may conclude that her own and her son's taste had experienced some change with regard to art.

HERR RATH GOETHE

CHAPTER V

THE GOETHE FAMILY

> How many joys are trodden under foot—whilst people stare upwards and don't note what lies at their feet.
>
> *A brew from Frau Aja's kitchen.*

FROM many a passage in the autobiography we get a clear glimpse of the family life and an idea of the family characters of the Goethe household. There is the Herr Rath, the father, certainly affectionate and well-meaning, cherishing within a very tender love for wife and children, but having that trait in his disposition, characterised by his son as *Des Lebens ernstes Führen* * which impelled him to maintain, with incredible consistency, an exterior of brazen sternness, thinking thereby the better to attain the two chief aims of his life—the best education for his children, and the establishing, regulating, and preserving his well-founded house.

There is the Räthin, the mother, as yet little more than a child herself, who first grew to

* Earnest carrying-out of life.

full consciousness with and in her two eldest children.

There are the children: Cornelia, the little daughter, full of bright intelligence, which caused her, alas! to become the ready victim of her father's too rabid pedagogism; Little Jacob, the delicate pet lamb, of small account except to his mother; and the eldest boy, Wolfgang, in whom the family interest already began to centre —for it was apparent that he was an uncommon boy. All his senses were alert; everything that passed around him interested him. His rambles through his native town, his numerous studies, political events, religious emotion, his intercourse with others, all and each acted on his impressionable nature with strong developing force.

It is not of the son but of the mother that we are writing, therefore we must not dwell too long on the fascinating subject of the evolution of a genius, yet because the mother's nature was so closely united with that of her brilliant son, through her long life, we cannot resist dwelling a little on what must have been so vitally interesting to her.

This extract from the autobiography will give an idea of the child's alertness of mind:

"A certain leaning towards antiquity implanted itself firmly in the boy's mind, which was especially encouraged and nourished by old

chronicles, woodcuts, such as those of Grave of the Siege of Frankfurt; and side by side with this appeared a longing to comprehend simple human conditions in their manifoldness and naturalness apart from any special claim to Beauty. Therefore it was one of our most favourite walks, which we begged to be allowed to take once or twice a year, round the inner circuit of the town walls. Gardens, back yards, and out-buildings extend as far as the Zwinger; one could see several thousand human beings, in the domestic, small, isolated, private circumstances of their lives. From the showy ornamental gardens of the rich to the orchards which provided the citizen with necessary food, from the factories, bleaching-ground, and similar institutions, yes, even to 'God's acre' itself—for a complete little world lay within the limits of the old town—one passed through a manifold marvellous scene, which changed at each step:—our childish curiosity hardly knew how to revel in it enough. For truly the famous Devil-on-two-sticks, when he took the roofs off that night in Madrid, for his friend's benefit, did hardly more for him than was done here for us, under the open sky, in clear sunlight."

It was to the mother, not to the father, that the delight of such rambles was confided. "He [her son] always came merrily home," she says, "having met with a hundred adventures."

Mother and children looked at the world with healthy eyes; capable and desirous of enjoying

the present, she could respond to the emotional side of their natures. Her love of poetry, her imagination, was reflected in their childish minds.

The father was a dilettante in art; it was a hobby of his; he patronised it. With the mother and children it was innate, a part of themselves. Poetry meant for him rhyme—for them rich fancy, ideal beauty.

The Herr Rath, having no profession to engross his superfluous energy, dominated his household with the autocratic justice mixed with unconscious tyranny, so often exercised by an unoccupied man over wife and children. His tastes must be their tastes, his carefully considered demands must be met by implicit obedience. He regulated their studies, their employments, their amusements. He would have regulated their thoughts with the same conscientious completeness, had that been possible.

So eager was he in his desire to encourage, that he in some cases shared their lessons. It is a little amusing, a little pathetic, to find the middle-aged gentleman making himself a child with his children.

Thus he toiled with them at drawing, or rather at the eyesight- and patience-wasting copying of representations of things, nowhere to be found on earth, which in those days went by the name of drawing.

It is funnier still to picture him, the tall, loosely-made, slow-moving Herr Rath, teaching his lively youngsters dancing. His son tells us :

"He never allowed himself to lose his composure, but taught us, most correctly, the positions and steps, and when he had got us forward enough to dance a minuet, he played something easy for us in 3–4 time on the flute-douce, and we attitudinised to it as best we might."

Surely a comical sight, the grave man pirouetting and bowing, with two little figures trying to imitate his stiff, stately, elephantine motions.

But we are glad to know that he would afterwards unbend and patiently play for them, whilst they danced in their own sweet way, heedless of form and etiquette.

The little girl suffered most from the Herr Rath's *ernstes Führen*. Oh! the long music-lessons, the hours of practice on that ineffective clavichord, and by-and-by on that new-comer, the piano, which exacted prolonged attention, and, to make matters worse, with that prosaic father so conscientiously presiding.

Herr Goethe succeeded in making his daughter an accomplished pianist, but he spoilt the music of her nature. She became morose and a prey to that inward rebellion, the inevitable response to

tyranny, even when it is well-meant and unconscious tyranny.

All the pent-up love of the sister's young soul, thus persecuted by the father's misdirected affection, found outlet in devotion to her brother. How she longed to accompany him on those glorious rambles through Frankfurt, to watch the cranes and the market boats by the river, to rummage the bookstalls for the old books they both loved; to take part in those interesting chats with shopkeepers and mechanics, when errands for his father took him to the various shops. How she looked for his cheerful homecoming. How she listened to his wondrous stories of adventure in which the young monkey himself figured as hero. How she admired his incipient attempts at poetry. It was through him she was in touch with the wide, wonderful life of the world, with the movements so craved for by an eager, imaginative, clever child.

The Herr Rath's hobbies were hardly less grievous to his lively children than his pedagogism.

Silkworm-breeding was one of these. In the little top gable-room, tables were covered with boards, and here these most uninteresting pets were established. "They grew so fast and were so ravenous," says Goethe, "that we could hardly supply them with enough mulberry leaves, and

they had to be fed day and night." This was all very well whilst the weather was fine; in fact, it was rather fun; but when the cold set in and mulberry leaves were scarce, it was quite another matter. It was worse still when at last it began to rain; for the creatures could not stand damp, so the wet leaves had to be carefully wiped and dried, but as this could not always be managed, the tiresome charges fell ill, the infection spread and the poor children found it anything but pleasant doing hospital duty for invalid silkworms. It would need a Pasteur's patience, a Pasteur's ambition, to enjoy such a loathsome task; it would need a Pasteur's genius to make it effective; it was not inviting to the genius of a small boy poet.

At length, after some of the finest spring and summer weeks had been wasted on the silkworms, Herr Goethe himself grew tired of his tiresome hobby, and the silkworms gave place to a hardly less irksome undertaking. The poor children were set to work to restore the engravings.

Goethe's propensity for introducing the smallest characteristic incidents of his daily life into his poems justifies us in assuming that the following passage, from *Hermann and Dorothea*, gives an idea of the Herr Rath's method of rebuke:

As a boy, chanced once on a Sunday
That I impatiently stood for the carriage eagerly waiting,
Which was to take us a drive to the fountain under the lime-trees.

It came not, and I ran like a weasel hither and thither,
Upstairs and downstairs oft; and from the door to the window
Seemed to me all my fingers itcht, I drummed on the table,
Pawed on the floor with my feet, and had almost fallen aweeping.
All this saw my father in quiet; but when, at the last, I
All too silly became, by the arm he tranquilly took me,
Led me up to the window, and spoke what well I remember;
"Seest thou the carpenter's shop there opposite closed for the Sunday?
Soon on the morrow it opens, and plane and saw are in motion,
And from morn to night they there are constantly working.
But bethink thee of this; in the end there will be a morning
When the Master will work, and all his journeymen with him,
Making a coffin there . . ."

WHEWELL.

The father, after graphically describing the scene, ends thus:

"Which at the last patient alike and impatient must lie in."

The little future poet was only too impressionable.

And forthwith [he says], in my spirit I saw all this as before me.
And sat patiently down, and waited then for the carriage.

Let us hope when it came the poor child enjoyed his drive and forgot the gloomy picture.

It was well for husband and children that Frau Aja was wife and mother, that her cheerful spirit pervaded the large house, that her cheerful voice was to be heard singing about the wide staircase or from her well-replenished storeroom, that she

kept the demon of family peevishness well in hand, that to her one and all, master, children, or servant, could look for ready sympathy. That "a brew from Frau Aja's kitchen" could set all household matters straight.

Even the evenings in the Goethe home were not dedicated to recreation; the pedagogue still prevailed. Books were read aloud, and what books! "I still remember," says his son at the age of sixty-two, "such a winter, when we had thus to work our way through Power's *History of the Popes*. It was a terrible time, as little or nothing that occurs in ecclesiastical affairs can interest children and young people."

We should think not indeed! Fancy the lively young mother and poor little Cornelia, tired with her day's practice, pretending to listen to the droning voice of the fidgety Hätschelhans, whilst the Herr Rath nodded in his arm-chair. Yet no matter how dry and unproductive, a book once begun must be read to the bitter end, even if his family were in despair about it and himself half asleep; such was his perverse decree. It seemed as if he regarded completeness as the only end, perseverance as the one virtue.

Sometimes the evening's entertainment was varied by a kind of lecture delivered by the worthy Rath. This took place in the picture room, the walls of which were hung with views,

maps, and plans of the cities he had visited. He made the boy read a manuscript description of his journey, whilst they walked from map to map. Herr Goethe's finger tracing out every detail of the route.

This was not so bad; the intelligent fancy of the little son willingly followed his tall father through those delicious experiences. This kind of geography lesson was delightful. How the boy longed to go to that lovely land of Italy, land of exquisite nature and superb art, and although a constantly retold tale palls at last even on the ear of childhood, the longing thus roused was not again laid to rest.

Long years after, when the boy was a youth, it wrestled against the longing for public life in his soul, and, though the latter was then victorious, it became so keen and strong in middle manhood that it allured him from friends, duty, home, to wander alone and secretly in that land of desire, and at length found expression in Mignon's exquisite wail:

Kennst du das Land, wo die Citronen blühn,*
Im dunkeln Laub die Gold Orangen glühn
Kennst du es wohl?
Dahin! Dahin!
Geht unser Weg!

* Know'st thou the land where lemon-trees do bloom
And oranges like gold in leafy gloom;
* * *
Know'st thou it then?
Our way runs; 'tis there! 'tis there. CARLYLE.

The didactic Herr Rath had no affinity for the poetry of that yearning. No, for full comprehension the boy must turn to his mother, the mother who wrote to him in her sixty-fourth year, that the feeling left in her by that

Dahin ! Dahin !

was beyond description.

Frau Aja and her children must enjoy their poetry secretly ; rhyme alone would satisfy their schoolmaster.

Perhaps the finest poem of which Germany could then boast was the stately, passionless *Messiah* of Klopstock. This had just appeared, and Herr Goethe applied rule and measure to it and found it wanting. His culture being acquired, not intuitive, his judgment could not be spontaneous. The *Messiah* did not satisfy his code of criticism. It was condemned ; nay more, the friend who had been bold enough to bring it to his notice and support its merits came near to forfeiting his friendship.

Frau Aja at once recognised its real if limited excellence, yet she dared not read it openly, lest conjugal peace should suffer shipwreck on such a rock of offence.

The children revelled in the book in quiet corners. The boy's poetical faculty was caught by the imposing rhythm and the sublime subject.

He and Cornelia learnt the most forcible passages by heart, repeating them, as children do, with great gusto in and out of season.

One Saturday evening, in winter, Herr Goethe was being shaved, and the children, ordered to be quiet whilst so serious a performance was proceeding, sat on a low stool, snugly, by the warm stove. Suddenly a passionate little voice broke the stillness of the room :

" Help me," it cried, " I entreat thee ;
I will worship thee shouldst thou wish it.
The monster, abandoned, dark sinner,
Help me ! I suffer the pangs of Death eternal and vengeful ;
Once could I hate thee, hate thee with terrible hatred ;
But now can I hate thee no more !
And this is sharp torture of tortures."

The voice rose to a shrill shriek—

" How am I crushed."

Hearing such sentiments proceeding from a small girl behind the stove, is it to be wondered at that the barber emptied his carefully prepared lather into the breast of the Herr Rath's handsome dressing-gown? Was not the Herr Rath rather to be congratulated that the shaving operations had not reached a more critical stage?

He rose with soapy chin and severe expression to demand explanation, and to his dismay the boy confessed to being the devil, the girl announced herself his victim.

Klopstock's hexameters were from that moment more hateful than ever to the Herr Rath. The book was confiscated and condemned.

On the whole, however, we gather that the Goethe family was very comfortably conditioned and harmonious. Cornelia, alone, not having the radiant tolerance of mother and brother, felt the Herr Rath's affectionate tyranny unduly galling. We note that the household was entirely *bürgerlich*, in its simplicity, its sturdy independence, in a certain proud integrity.

Its friends and acquaintances were also *bürgerliche*, well-to-do citizens of a thriving and free city, having respect for art, though a limited conception of it, who enjoyed the geniality of the Räthin's round table and the flavour of the Rath's good wine.

But the family had one dear friend of quite other character. Fräulein von Klettenberg was not *bürgerliche*, but had a strain of the "old noblesse" in her composition, which was refined and elevated by a religion so pure and real that it raised all those with whom she came in contact to a higher and purer atmosphere.

CHAPTER VI

BILLETING

When I consider my own experience and think of all the tomfoolery I have wished for, and not wished for, and how if it had happened so, the noblest epoch of my real life could not have taken place, on the contrary all would have been ruined, spoilt. I have sworn most sacredly never to mix or meddle again with my foolish foresight, but to live from day to day, to treasure up all small pleasures, but not to dissect them. In a word—daily to be more childlike—for that is *summa summarum* the truest way to win the grace of God.

Frau Aja's letter to the Duchess Amalia.

AS soon as the worthy Herr Goethe had put his house in order and—not having clear insight into the hearts of those he held dear—thought the calm monotony of his domestic existence was assured, something occurred to break that too even monotony.

It came in the form of one of those "billetings" which made the crux of Frau Aja's life.

Probably this particular "billeting" was among the things that she would at the time

have wished otherwise, but which she eventually recognised as a blessing in disguise.

On New Year's Day of the year 1759, the customary celebrations were interrupted by ominous sounds. The warder's trumpet, from one of the towers that guarded the city, constantly sounded an alarm, the regular tramp of feet betrayed the advance of troops, and before long it was known from end to end of Frankfurt that the French had entered and taken possession.

The Seven Years War had been raging all around for some time, many not-far-distant towns had suffered from it. Frankfurt-am-Main, hitherto immune, had at last been involved. The French had come seeking winter quarters.

Surely we can feel for the Rath and Räthin. Their house was just finished and arranged. The Rath was a man who kept very much to himself, never having got over the snub he had received from his fellow-citizens when they refused his offer to serve without emolument. He was moreover a staunch admirer of the Great Frederick. Yet now he must receive a Frenchman into his house, give up to this foreigner and his suite those rooms he had arranged with such order for the use and instruction of his family—must submit to have the quiet routine he so much loved exchanged for turmoil and bustle—must,

in a word, play second fiddle in his own orchestra.

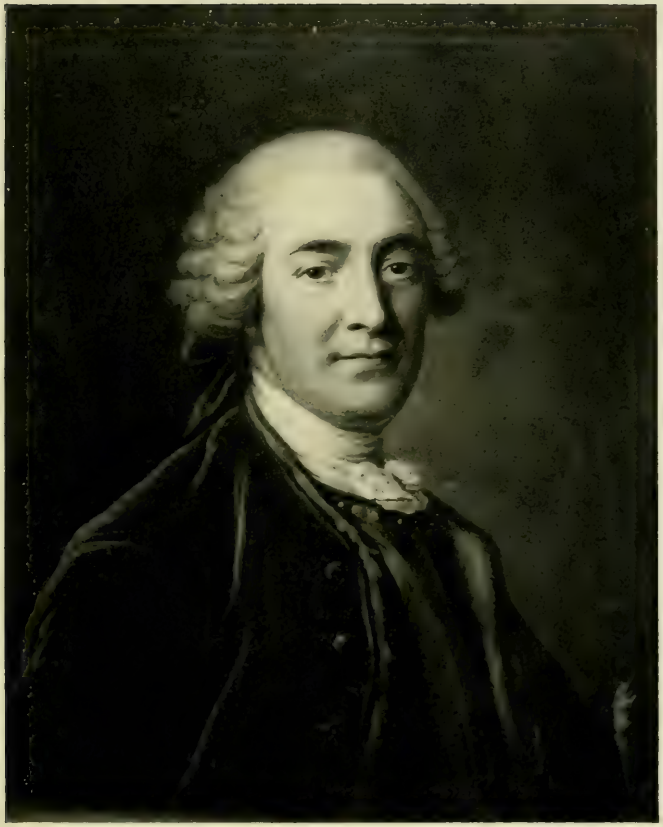
The Goethe's were, as a matter of fact, fortunate in having such a person quartered upon them as François de Théas, Comte de Thoranc, for, if he was a Frenchman, he possessed to the full the virtues of his nation. He was a gallant, just, honourable, courteous gentleman ; in fact his courtesy had that fine flavour about it that is conveyed by the grand phrase *noblesse oblige*. His innate nobility obliged the Count to behave to his bourgeois host with a consideration that seemed rather to enrage than mollify the latter.

The extreme refinement of his nature is illustrated by his mode of taking possession.

It was night when he arrived, and during the discussion as to which rooms should be allotted to him, he heard the picture room mentioned. He immediately requested permission to see it, at least to have a glance round by candlelight, saying he was greatly interested in works of art ; he hoped thus to win the favour or at least the tolerance of his surly host.

Herr Goethe complied with his request, but French courtesy could not prevail against German stubborn nationality. The poet tells us of his father :

"He let that happen which he was powerless to prevent, but held aloof in the most passive



FRANÇOIS DE THÉAS, COMTE DE THORANC
Original in Frankfurt, Goethehaus

manner. The unusual events which were going on before him were repugnant to him in every detail."

Count de Thoranc, meantime, behaved perfectly. He would not even have maps nailed on the walls, lest the new papers should be injured and he obliged his servants to be quiet and orderly.

Although a soldier, he was now doing civil duty: as King's lieutenant he had to hear and decide the disputes which took place between citizens and the military, questions of debt and barter. Business was often not over until late in the night.

There was only one staircase from top to bottom of the house, therefore it was unavoidable that the quiet family life should be much disturbed.

Poor, dignified, self-respecting Herr Goethe has our sincere sympathy.

His son says:

"If it had been possible for him to take the affair less seriously, he might have saved himself and us many vexatious hours, since he spoke French fluently and knew how to behave in society with dignity and grace."

Yes, but that was just what he could *not* do, he did *not* feel agreeable, he would not pretend

to feel so, sturdy German burgher that he was, he would not condescend to this French intruder.

It was different with Frau Goethe, now a pleasing young matron of twenty-eight. She rose at once to the occasion; her universal sympathy with mankind caused her to see both sides of the question; her light, happy temperament soon recovered from any vexation she felt on account of damage to her house.

The earnest, courtly French nobleman, with his serious, ugly face, was not without interest for her. She therefore did her best to make him comfortable, and to ease the strained relations between him and her husband, who daily became more morbidly irritable.

With this end in view, she set herself at once to learn French. In this she was greatly aided by a friend of the family, who lived opposite, and had fortunately been appointed interpreter to Count de Thoranc. With his assistance, she managed to explain to her unwelcome guest how trying her position was, on account of her husband's state of mind, and in his defence she managed to insist very cleverly on all his causes for vexation—the recently decorated house, his retiring nature, his absorption in the education of his children. The Count, flattered by the trouble the mistress of the house had taken on his behalf and priding himself on his equity of dealing,

having moreover a certain dry humour, took upon himself to behave as an exemplary pensioner, and, through the whole year of his residence, never varied in his courtesy, so that she attained her purpose and moreover the consideration that was properly due to her.

The King's lieutenant exercised the utmost self-denial; even gifts due to his position he declined; the least thing resembling corruption was repelled with anger, nay with punishment; his people were most strictly enjoined not to cause the landlord the slightest expense.

The children had all kinds of good things sent them from the nobleman's dinner-table. French dainties tasted delicious to the little German palates. It gives an idea of the simplicity of Frau Aja's housekeeping and of the times when we hear that she could not believe that ice, however much sweetened and disguised, could be fit to eat, and to the vexation of her little ones threw away this delicacy when it appeared among the Count's gifts.

It is easy to imagine that the youngsters enjoyed all this, but since the father grew more and more ill-tempered, the mother had much to contend with.

It was of no use telling him that it was an actual blessing to have such a gentleman as inmate, rather than a constant change of officers

or common soldiers. He would not listen to reason; the present condition seemed to him so intolerable he could not realise a worse, poor man, so he lost heart and no longer pursued his educational and other plans with his accustomed zest.

Meantime mother and children found their guest more and more entertaining. The Count was a humorist, and always delivered his decisions with some witty *bon mot*. Every day their friend the interpreter had a fresh lively anecdote to relate.

By degrees the somewhat mysterious character of their guest was explained. He was perfectly conscious of his own peculiarities and, because he was subject occasionally to a species of hypochondria, he withdrew at such times, which often lasted for days, to his private apartment, saw no one but his valet, and could not be induced to give audience even in most urgent cases.

As soon as the evil spirit left him, he appeared the same as ever, mild, cheerful and alert.

The valet, St. Jean, a thin good-tempered little man given to gossip, told Frau Aja in strict confidence that in former years his master, when under the influence of one of these dark moods, had done some great wrong, and that now, conscious of his exalted and responsible position, he dreaded being

betrayed into such an act again and earnestly guarded his behaviour from any such risk.

Such a story was certain to touch Frau Aja's ready sympathy, and indeed the good Count's residence in the house was more beneficial than harmful to the inmates; it contributed considerably to the development of the boy. Bringing him into contact with art and artists and above all with the high polish of French nobility, it broke the dullness of *bürgerlich* monotony and let in the light of a wider culture.

Yet the very affability and condescension of his uninvited visitor irritated the poor master of the house. How he waited and longed for news that would give some hope of relief from this incubus of a hateful presence in the home where he loved to reign supreme.

At length, after three months' endurance, there were rumours; the armies had begun to move, Duke Ferdinand von Braunschweig was coming to drive the French from the Main and the hopes of the adherents of the King of Prussia rose high. Herr Goethe's rose too high; like those who are easily depressed he was as easily elated.

Frau Goethe, on the other hand, hitherto cheerful and patient, was now a prey to anxiety. She was not greatly interested in politics; her shrewd foresight told her that a billet of rough

Prussian soldiers might be a bad exchange for the polished French nobleman.

Even worse was to be dreaded, all the horrors of a beleaguered town, indiscriminate plundering, nay, possibly—massacre.

But the King's lieutenant reassured her. "Be quite easy," he told her. "There is nothing to fear; keep quiet and do not talk about affairs with any one."

The injunction not to gossip was not unnecessary since all the chief business of the French army went on in the Count's apartments, and bright, curious, boyish eyes watched from an upper landing the coming and going of the smart French officers.

Troops marched through the city. It was said that at Bergen the armies would meet. The Prussians had reached Windecken, only fifteen miles north-east of Frankfurt on the right bank of the Nidda. Frankfurt was in a turmoil of military excitement, horsemen dashed hither and thither. The Goethe house was in the midst of it day and night.

The bright brown eyes watching saw Marèchal de Broglie and the Prince Soubise among others constantly coming for councils of war with the King's lieutenant.

Nobody imagined that the bright brown watching eyes belonged to one who was to do

more for Germany than any of her martial heroes —make her more famous, give her a more widespread, more lasting renown.

We hear nothing of the conflict which must have been going on in the heart of the ten-year-old Wolfgang Goethe, who adored the Great Frederick with a boy's hero-worship, yet loved sincerely the gentle French Count, who, on his part, spoilt and petted the interesting little fellow more and more each day.

How were the boy's feelings divided between the grand heroic figure he had never seen and the kind gentleman whose courtly figure was daily before him?

The cool-headed privy councillor Goethe, who could discuss the theory of colour, whilst the cannons thundered before Verdun, was not likely, at the age of sixty-two, to remember vividly the enthusiasm of the boy Goethe of ten. The autobiography gives us no idea of the boy's state of mind, yet no doubt it was even then gathering stores for future activity.

Good Friday of 1759 at last arrived after an unquiet Passion Week. Goethe tells us calmly in the autobiography, "A great quietness forecast the approaching storm."

Suspense and uncertainty hourly increased. The children were kept within doors.

And the father, the Herr Rath, what was his

state of mind?—not enviable. A Frenchman held state in his house, whilst *he*, the master, was a staunch adherent of the great Frederick.

Should the Prussians be victorious, that hated Frenchman would be turned out neck and crop: the Herr Rath would again be paramount in his own house. If the French won—how could he endure that insulting presence? He took his great-coat and hat, strode out of that severe street door, down the three formal steps, up the Hirsch Graben, along the Zeil, then northwards till he reached his garden by the Friedberger Gate.

The battle had begun at Bergen, some seven miles away. Wolfgang, posted at an upper window, could hear the thunder of the cannon and the rattle of the musketry distinctly, though he could not see so far as Bergen.

Hours elapsed; then the first dread results o war made their appearance; a row of waggons passed slowly along, filled with wounded, piteously mutilated, going to the hospital that had been improvised in the Liebfrauen Kloster.

The pity of the kind-hearted inhabitants of Frankfurt was at once on the alert; beer, bread, wine, money were handed to those among the poor wretches who were in a state to receive it. But when a little later, captive Germans were perceived among the wounded, pity broke all bounds, and it seemed as if each one wished to

divest himself of everything he possessed for the relief of his oppressed compatriots.

These German prisoners testified that the battle had not altogether favoured the allies.

Whilst mother and children at home were witnessing such painful scenes, Frau Aja was wondering anxiously where her husband had gone in his headstrong temerity; for the Herr Rath had rashly set out to meet and welcome, so he fondly imagined, his victorious countrymen, not considering, foolish man, that the defeated party must rush over him in their headlong flight.

First he had gone to his garden near the Friedberger Gate. Here he had found all quiet and solitary, then he slipped through the little door in the wall and ventured as far as the Bornheimer Heath. Here he caught sight of several stragglers and camp followers from the army; these vagabonds were amusing themselves by firing at the boundary stones, so that the lead whistled round Herr Goethe's head in a manner anything but pleasant.

Nothing but risk was to be gained by going on, so he reluctantly turned back with waning hope, and later learnt, to his mortal chagrin, what the sound of the firing should have already told him, that all was going well with the French, that they, not the Germans, were the victors.

Returning home in no very pleasant mood, he,

at sight of his wounded countrymen, quite lost his customary self-control.

He sternly ordered refreshment and donation to be handed to the passing soldiers, but Germans alone were to be the recipients. Fate had so closely packed friend and foe that the order was not easily carried out, yet in the eyes of the angry Rath, not even their urgent misery could unite them.

Mother and children, confident in the protection of their friend the King's lieutenant, had passed a tolerably comfortable day; Frau Aja was never given to unnecessary foreboding or complaining. Their chief anxiety had been for the father, whose foolhardy obstinacy they knew so well. Where had it taken him? By what unwise action had it involved him?

These anxious questions were set at rest by the appearance of the Rath, unscathed though weary and depressed.

The children ran to cling about him, telling him with the eagerness and tactlessness of childhood how safe they were under the protection of his enemy.

Frau Aja, always mindful of the needs of a weary man, had good food ready for him.

But the moody Herr Rath put coaxing wife and children aside, went straight to his private room and there shut himself up to nurse

his anger and disappointment to his heart's content.

By-and-by Count de Thoranc also returned. He had been out all day on horseback: he too was tired. The children ran to greet him, almost as pleased to see him safely back as they had been to see their father. The Count was in a different frame of mind. His cause was victorious; he came triumphant; he was pondering good tidings. The innocent welcome, full of childlike friendliness, independent of the larger emotions of patriotism and party spirit, fell in well with his happy humour. The caresses accorded, to his thinking, with the course of affairs. He returned them with more than his usual warmth, saying affectionately:

"I am glad for your sakes also, dear children."

Then he too retired to his apartments, not to sulk, but to enjoy to the full his well-cooked French dinner. Nor did he forget to send his little friends an extra share of the wonderful foreign delicacies.

Frau Aja, though relieved by her guest's manner and words from the more urgent anxiety of the day, had still reason for uneasiness.

If her husband's ill-humour should encounter the Count's gaiety, there would be a thunder-clap.

Besides, Frau Goethe was far too good a wife

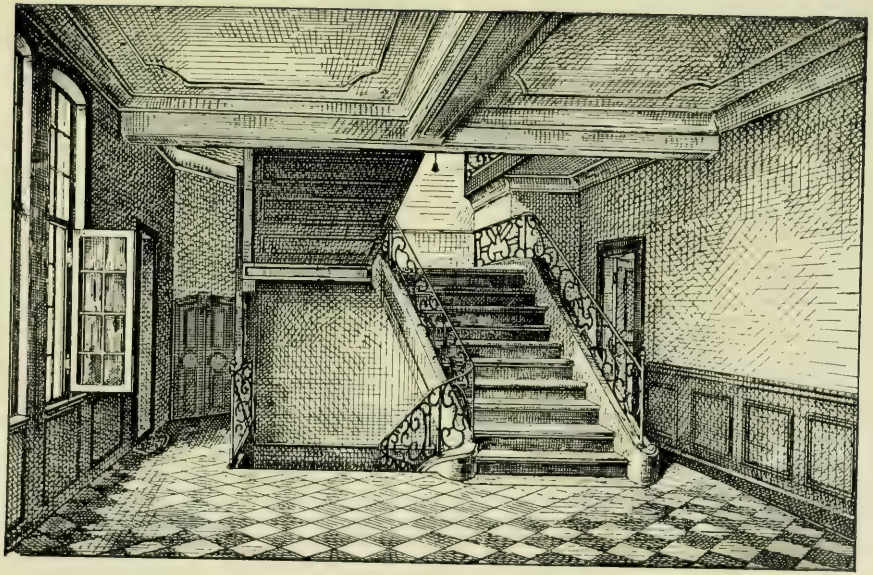
and housewife to be content that the master of the house should be sitting solitary and fasting whilst the intruder chatted cheerfully over his French cook's dainties and washed them down with his host's Rhine wine. She quickly cleared away the remains of the children's feast and spread a substantial family supper in true German style, in which no doubt the celebrated collared head of Frankfurt duly figured.

Supper ready, many were the journeys she and the youngsters had to take up and down the wide staircase before they could persuade the sulky Herr Rath that he did his enemy no harm by punishing himself. She dared not propose sending supper to him; such irregularity in domestic arrangements he would never tolerate even in extremity.

At length the importunity of his family or his hunger prevailed; he promised to join them in a few minutes. Little did they imagine what they had prepared for themselves and him.

The landings of the Goethe house, as we have seen, were spacious, large enough in fact to be used by the family as rooms in summer.

Count de Thoranc had been out all day. Civil business had fallen into arrears. Crowds of applicants awaited the judgment of the King's lieutenant, therefore Thoranc was holding a little



SCENE OF THE ALTERCATION BETWEEN THE HERR RATH AND COUNT DE THORANC

court on the particular landing belonging to his suite of apartments.

Thus it was that the Herr Rath, his irritability intensified by want of food, had to pass through the throng on the lobby, where the Frenchman was delivering judgments in mimic state.

And then—Count de Thoranc did that which was unworthy his courtesy and high breeding. He—flushed with victory and with the generous Rhine wine—stepped forward and stopped his fasting host and demanded congratulations on the defeat of the German's countrymen.

"You must congratulate us and yourselves," said the elated Count, "that the dangerous affair has gone off so well."

"I wish they had chased you to the Devil, even if I had had to go too," was the enraged retort.

De Thoranc restrained himself a moment, then broke out angrily : "You shall repent this ; you shall not insult me and the right with impunity."

The Rath made no reply, but deliberately descended the stairs, quietly joined his family, appeared more cheerful and, to the satisfaction of his wife, ate a good supper.

Bravo, old Rath! It is not pleasant to be asked for congratulations on your own defeat, in your own house, by a courtly Frenchman.

Mother and children had no idea in what risky

way he had relieved his feelings. They just basked in the sunshine that had returned, and only wondered a little how the clouds had been dispersed.

Their satisfaction, however, was not of long duration.

By-and-by Frau Aja's friend, the Count's interpreter, summoned her from the room, with grave mysterious countenance.

The children, feeling the restraint of their father's mood for the moment relaxed, seized the opportunity of their mother's absence to chatter to him of all the good things the kind Herr Count had sent them and of how sorry they were he had not felt inclined to share the glorious feast. Thus they innocently prattled, the Rath no longer checking them, but with a defiant smile on his sturdy German face, listening half to them, half for some sound from the staircase.

In a short time the interpreter returned, his face longer than ever. The children must be sent to bed at once, he said. The children, nothing loath, tired out by this day of adventure, trotted off, nor heard till the morning, after a good night's rest, of the thunderstorm that had rolled over their home.

What occurred may be best told in the words of the autobiography, very slightly abridged.

"The King's lieutenant," says Goethe, "had ordered my father immediately to the guard-house. His subalterns knew well that he must not be contradicted; still before this they had often deserved his thanks by delaying the execution of his commands. The interpreter, a man who never lost his wits, reminded them urgently of this. The tumult, moreover, was so great that delay was not only excusable but imperative. He had therefore called my mother out, putting it into her hands to work on the adjutants with entreaty and persuasion to gain at least a respite."

This commission, we may well believe, Frau Aja would carry out effectively. No doubt the officers would remember many a kind attention, many an hospitable action on the part of their cheerful hostess.

To quote the autobiography again:

"The interpreter, meantime, betook himself to the Count. The latter, controlling his rage, with great self-government, had retired into his private cabinet, preferring rather to let the most important affairs wait, for the present, than wreak the anger he was feeling on the innocent, by giving a prejudged decision that should prove unworthy of himself.

"The interpreter boldly entered the sacred precincts, a proceeding strictly forbidden.

"'What do you want?' cried the annoyed Count. 'Be off! No one is to come in here but St. Jean.'

"'Then you must imagine I am St. Jean, for a moment,' answered the intruder.

"'I shall need imagination for that; two of him wouldn't make you. Go away.'

"'Herr Count, you have received a great gift from Heaven, I appeal to it.'

"'Don't think to flatter me! It won't do.'

"'You have the great gift, Herr Count, of listening to the opinion of others, even in moments of passion.'

"'Well, well! I have listened too long to opinions. I know very well that we are not loved here, that these burghers look askance at us. What! these towns! they want to be called imperial, do they? They have seen their Emperor elected and crowned, and now when he is unjustly attacked and is in danger of losing his dominions and having to submit to a usurper, and luckily finds true allies who are willing to spend their money and blood in his service, they won't bear the small burden which falls to their share.'

"'You have known their sentiments for a long time, and like a wise man have borne with them, and there are only a few thus minded, only a few who, as you know, are blinded by the brilliant qualities of the extraordinary man * whom you yourself admire.'

"'Yes, I have known and suffered it too long, else this man had not dared to offer me such an insult at the most critical moment. There may be as many as they like, they shall be punished in this their bold representative, then they will know what they have to expect.'

* Frederick the Great.

"'Put it off a little, Herr Count!'

"'Certain things cannot be done too quickly.'

"'Put it off just a little! What you are doing becomes the King's lieutenant but don't forget you are also the Count Thoranc.'

"'The latter has nothing to say in the matter.'

"'Still you ought to hear the brave man.'

"'What would he say, pray.'

"'Herr King's lieutenant! he would say, you have put up so long with so many gloomy, sulky, incapable men, when they did not vex you too much. This man has certainly provoked you; but conquer your resentment, Herr King's lieutenant, and all will praise and value you.'

"'You know that I have put up with your nonsense many times, but don't abuse my good-will. Are these people utterly blind? If we had lost the battle, what would have been their fate? If we had been forced to flee, do you suppose the enemy would have sat with their hands in their laps? They would have hurled grenades, they would have set fire where they could. This master of the house, what does he want? A bomb would have burst in this very room, followed by another and another, in this very room with the cursed China wallpaper I have taken such care of and not even nailed up my maps! They ought to have been on their knees all day. Instead they spoil the best, happiest moment of my life with their party spirit.'

"'It is party spirit, but you will only increase it by the punishment of this man. You will be called a tyrant, he a martyr.'

"'Then you must imagine I am St. Jean, for a moment,' answered the intruder.

"'I shall need imagination for that; two of him wouldn't make you. Go away.'

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"'It is party spirit, but you will only increase it by the punishment of this man. You will be called a tyrant, he a martyr.'

"'I have listened to you too long; get you gone.'

"'Hear just one thing more. You have certainly no reason to congratulate yourself on the good-will of your landlord, but the housewife is all you could wish, the children look on you as an uncle. At one blow you will destroy for ever the peace and happiness of this dwelling. Yes, I can truly say had a bomb fallen in it, it would not cause greater desolation. Count, I have so often admired your self-mastery, give me now an opportunity of revering you, it will be to your lasting glory.'

"'That would be fine,' sneered the Count.

"'Naturally,' answered the interpreter; 'I did not bring wife and children to your feet, for I know you hate scenes, but I will paint you to them in such colours that they will talk all their lives of the battle of Bergen, and of your magnanimity on this day, and tell it to their children's children.'

"'You have not touched my weak side. I care nothing for posthumous fame, that is for others, not for me; to do the duty of the moment, that is my care; we have talked too long already, be off and—let the thankless thank you, for *I spare him.*"

"The interpreter was so surprised and moved by this unexpected happy conclusion that he could scarce refrain his tears, and would have kissed the Count's hands. The Count repulsed him, saying sternly and earnestly:

"'You know that I cannot stand this kind of thing,' and with these words passed into the ante-room to attend to pressing business."

Thus the matter ended. Herr Goethe was saved. Next day the little ones celebrated with, the remains of the Count's sweetmeats, his magnanimity and the passing of a great trouble which they had innocently slept through.

Little did the haughty Count de Thoranc imagine that the son of the man he had pardoned would one day bestow on him the posthumous fame he despised.

The Rath never yielded an inch ; in spite of the Count's clemency, he would never be friends. At last he succeeded in inducing the authorities to relieve him of his hated guest. Count de Thoranc took his departure, courteous to the last.

To avoid future billetings the Goethe family had to take lodgers to fill their vacant rooms.

CHAPTER VII

HÄTSCHELHANS

Ach, wer bringt die schönen Tage,
Jene Tage der ersten Liebe,
Ach, wer bringt nur eine Stunde
Jeder holden Zeit zurück !
Einsam nähr ich meine Wunde
Und mit stets erneuter Klage
Traur' ich ums verlorne Glück.

Ach, wer bringt die schönen Tage,
Jede holde Zeit zurück.*

GOETHE.

THUS by her tact and wise discretion did the wife save her *Biedermann* † from the consequences of his stubbornness ; for though her champion, the interpreter, took to him-

* Oh, who can bring again those days,
Those days of early love,
Oh, who can one short hour recall
Of that most gracious time !
In solitude I feed my wound,
With constant fresh lament
I grieve for vanished joy.

Oh, who can bring the days again
Of that sweet gracious time.

† Good-man.

KATHARINA ELIZABETH GOETHE
(From relief by Melchior

self the credit, it was for the sake of the wife and children that the King's lieutenant, Count de Thoranc, that perfect type of a passing nobility, spared the husband.

We are glad to be able to say that the Rath himself affectionately acknowledged the Räthin's clever management, by a splendid gift, a snuff-box (for alas! Frau Aja, like the rest of her contemporaries, took snuff).

The care and thought Herr Goethe bestowed on his gift must have given it a value above its intrinsic worth, though this was great.

The box was fairly large. The appropriate design on the lid was a dove with an olive branch, very richly jewelled.

It is easy to picture Frau Goethe's delight with this costly proof of her husband's love, for it is on record that she greatly admired splendid things; moreover the snuff-box commemorated the advent of the long-wished-for peace, with the departure of the French intruders.

Readers may probably wish to know what Frau Aja was like at this time of her life. She was a buxom young matron, perhaps slightly inclined to stoutness, with fresh complexion, brown hair and lively brown eyes; as for her nose, what exactly that was like it is hard to say, for in portraits and silhouettes it rings all the changes from small and tip-tilted to long and

beak-like—most likely it was a happy medium. She had pretty shapely arms, which on occasions she adorned with bracelets, to the admiration of her girl friends, of whom she had many, as we shall hear later.

Although Frau Aja and her children had been on the most friendly terms with their foreign visitor, it is certain she preferred his room to his company.

It must not for a moment be supposed that Frau Goethe was unpatriotic because she rejoiced in French victory, which mean tsafety for herself and those she held dear. We must take into consideration the fact that at that period Germany hardly had a national existence, so divided and independent were the several principalities and towns, so petty and personal were the politics, that patriotism had little to say in the matter.

Frankfurt called herself an imperial city, but the allegiance of the inhabitants was shared between the Kaiser they had elected and the great Frederick of Prussia whose glory dazzled them.

The Schultheiss Textor, Frau Aja's father, had carried the canopy over the Kaiser Franz I. at his coronation. Textor and his family were staunch adherents of the Kaiser, in fact a coolness had arisen on that account between them and Herr Goethe, and it is quite likely that Frau Goethe held the same opinions as her father,

even if she kept them to herself, for the sake of conjugal peace.

The thunder-cloud of war, which had broken over Germany in 1756, and swept over Frankfurt in 1759, passed away from that neighbourhood altogether in 1761.

Luckily for us we are not at present concerned with that "raveled sleave" of European politics which Carlyle so indomitably strove to untangle, but with a peaceable German household, where a woman, little ambitious to take part in governing kingdoms, was unobtrusively educating that genius which should eventually govern European thought.

The Goethe home was not again subjected to the discomfort of billeting; on the pretext of having lodgers already, it was exempt.

Herr Goethe, now happy in the quiet possession of his house, was able to pursue once more his own sweet, pedagogic way.

Frau Aja's existence during the six years from 1759 to 1765 was one of monotonous domesticity. The great spring washing of family linen, the rising of the river, the half-yearly fairs, when household necessaries were replenished, the autumnal vintage, were the most exciting events of the year.

In 1763, however, something occurred to disturb the peace of the home; Hätschelhans got into a scrape.

To begin with, he was a little fop. It is an amusing piece of heredity to find in the deep-minded Goethe, as in the frivolous Pepys, the inherited tailor element asserting itself, but Frau Aja herself bears witness that so it was. She tells us of Hätschelhans:

"In his dress he was most terribly particular. I was obliged to arrange three suits daily for him; upon one chair I hung a coat, long trousers, and ordinary waistcoat, and added a pair of boots; upon a second a dress coat and silk stockings, which he had already worn, &c. &c.; upon the third was everything of the finest, together with sword and hair-bag; the first he wore in the house, the second when visiting his common acquaintances, the third as full dress. When I entered the next day I had everything to put tidy. There stood the boots upon his fine cuffs and collars, the shoes thrown east and west, one thing lay here, the other there. Then I shook the dust out of his clothes, placed clean linen for him, and brought everything again into the right track. Shaking a waistcoat once at the open window rather vigorously, a quantity of pebbles suddenly flew into my face; upon this I began to grumble; he came up and I scolded him, for the pebbles might have struck my eyes. 'Well,' said he, 'but your eye is not out: where are the pebbles? I must have them again: help me to look for them.'"

What a regular boy! and what a funny little figure he must have cut in these home-made

"HATSCHEI HANS"

clothes, for Herr Goethe kept a private tailor, whose performances were more meritorious than becoming. The waistcoat made of gold cloth was adapted from his father's wedding waistcoat, for materials in those days were as durable as they were costly.

But to return to Hätschelhans' misdoings. It was not a very serious scrape, only an exceedingly boyish love-affair, yet at the time it seemed to the young lover to involve the world.

It is not surprising that the boy sought relief from the dull evenings at home. Perhaps the old Schultheiss, his grandfather, sympathised with him, since he presented his grandson with a free pass to the French theatre. This somewhat dangerous gift was not, as may be imagined, approved by the serious Herr Goethe; the indulgent mother, however, not by any means averse from theatre-going herself in moderation, overruled his objections, so that Wolfgang made very frequent use of it.

A scene from *Wilhelm Meister* gives us a notion of what sometimes occurred between father and son at this time.

"When Wilhelm greeted his mother next morning, she disclosed to him that his father was very vexed, and strictly forbid him these constant visits to the theatre. 'Although,' she continued, 'I like very well to go to the theatre,

still I could often detest it, since my home peace is quite destroyed by your excessive passion for this amusement. Your father is always saying, "What is the use of it? How can any one waste time like that?"'

"'He has said it to me,' answered Wilhelm, 'and I am afraid I answered too hastily; but for Heaven's sake, mother! is everything useless that doesn't put money in our purses?'

"'Only you might go in moderation,' said the mother; 'your father also wants a little amusement in the evening; and he thinks it makes you inattentive, and the consequence is I have to bear it when he is put out."'

The mother's entreaties, however, did not have much effect, the boy became more and more engrossed with play-going, often came in late to supper, and to a long angry argument with his father. The boy maintained hotly that the poetical justice in such plays as *Miss Sarah Sampson* and the *Merchant of London* was morally elevating, whilst the father quoted the rogueries of Scapin and the follies of his young master as calculated to demoralise, which proves the old Rath a double-dyed Puritan, unless wit is a vice and laughter sinful.

All the latest dramatic talent of the future poet was stirred by this theatre-going, and if he had remained a spectator, no great harm would have come of it, since the performances were in French

and not of a harmful character ; but, boylike, he must go behind the scenes.

The detailed features of the affair, minutely described in *Wahrheit und Dichtung*, belong rather to the son's portrait than to the mother's. It will suffice for this latter to give a considerably condensed version.

Hätschelhans, as we have seen, in spite of his father's discipline, in spite of the little spying window in the wall, had considerable liberty for a boy of fourteen : moreover, because of his highly impressionable disposition and eager interest in the variety of human life, because also of the fascination of his vivacious temperament, he readily made friends, not always very discreetly.

One boy in particular, whose parents, by the way, were for some cause not on good terms with Herr and Frau Goethe—probably the stiff old Rath looked down on their social position—attached himself to Wolfgang, whose verse-making he greatly admired. This boy boasted of his friend's talent to other youths of his acquaintance, young men who lived wild and irregular lives, who got their living in any way that came to hand, copying for lawyers, cramming for examinations, even preparing for confirmation—save the mark! These needy comrades were not slow to see that this talent for verse-making was a marketable commodity.

The first use they put it to was a questionable practical joke. They got the boy-poet to write an imaginary love-letter ; this they copied in a feigned hand and sent to one of their set, a foolish youth, pretending it came from a girl he admired.

When Hätschelhans heard the use that had been made of his effusions, he was not altogether pleased. The joke appeared to the carefully trained son of the correct Herr Rath somewhat vulgar. However, boylike, he followed the lead of older companions, and when the poor youth wished to reply to his lady, yet doubted his own poetic power, Wolfgang gave way so far as to agree to meet him and arrange the matter of the letter.

The boys met at a small restaurant, a little way outside Frankfurt.

The people who kept the restaurant had a young niece, Gretchen by name, who occasionally, in the absence of the servant, waited on the company. This girl was exceedingly pretty, especially when contrasted with her somewhat common environment, which served to enhance her natural refinement, so that it appeared greater than it actually was. Goethe describes her thus :

"A little cap was set neatly on her small head, which a slender neck united by charming curves to her shoulders. Everything about her was

refined, the quiet, true eyes and lovely mouth attracted and fascinated."

She appears to have behaved modestly and kindly.

She fetched wine for the young revellers, tasted one glass, then retired to help an invalid aunt to bed.

Doubtless a little excited by the wine and full of the ideas and emotions called up by the writing of vicarious love-letters, the impressionable Hätschelhans at once and entirely lost his heart.

The future author of *Werther* thus describes his first draught from the cup of passion :

"The form of that girl followed me from that moment everywhere. I went to church for love of her and through the long Protestant service gazed my fill at her."

The foolish lover, who had not the wit to voice his own devotion, was enchanted by the letter written by the talented boy lover, whose head was full of Gretchen. This, mischievous friends pretended to have conveyed to the lady, and vastly entertained by their thoughtless joke prevailed on the young Goethe to carry through the adventure and to compose a second letter in answer to the first, which should appear to be written by the mistress of the love-lorn swain.

With this in his pocket, the boy repaired to the

appointed rendezvous, the restaurant where the other conspirators were to meet him.

Only one had as yet arrived; Gretchen was at the window spinning, the mother went in and out about her household tasks.

The young poet read his effusion to his friend, still thinking of and occasionally stealing glances at the spinning Gretchen, taking in unconsciously, we cannot doubt, a vivid mental picture—to be reproduced so consummately in after years for a world's wonder.

The letter thus indited suited more his own case than that for which it was intended; it seemed to emanate from the simple heart of a girl like Gretchen rather than from that of a lady of wealth and station. This was pointed out to Goethe by the other youth, who by-and-by departed, leaving Hätschelhans, somewhat put out, to make corrections the other had suggested.

Somehow the work did not go smoothly and at last the boy cried aloud in a tone of irritation:

"It won't come right."

"So much the better," said a quiet voice! "I am glad of it: you should not meddle with things of that sort."

Gretchen then came to the table and gave her young adorer a sensible lecture.

"The thing seems an innocent joke," she said. "It is a joke, but not innocent. I have seen

many such lead our young people into great trouble."

"What am I to do?" asked the boy. "The letter is written, and they depend on me to correct it."

"Listen to what I say," she replied. "Don't correct it, take it away, and get your friends to set things right. I will put in a word; for you know, although I am a poor girl, and depend on my relations, I refused to write out the first letter, for they asked me, so they wrote it themselves in a feigned hand and they will do the same with this. They are not really bad, but for a bit of fun or to make a little money, they will do risky things; but why do you, a young man of good position and well off, why do you let them make a tool of you in an affair which will certainly not be for your good and may do you harm?"

The boy was only too pleased that his beloved took so much interest in him; his devotion increased tenfold, he read out the letter in a low and tender voice.

"It's really very pretty," she exclaimed. "It *is* a pity it should not be meant for some true purpose."

"That would indeed be lovely," he cried, thinking of her; "how happy would the fortunate fellow be who had such a letter from the girl he really loved. Supposing some one who really

knew, valued, honoured, worshipped you put such a note before you and pressingly begged you to sign it, what would you do?"

He pushed it towards her. She smiled, and being accustomed to such boy's nonsense she then and there signed it.

Up sprang the foolish boy; thinking himself madly in love he made an attempt to kiss her.

"No," she said, "that is so common, but if we can we will love."

Wolfgang seized the silly paper. "None shall have it now," he declared. "You have saved me."

"Then complete the rescue," she said; "make haste off before the others come."

He hurried away. Never in his life, he says, had he felt in such a tumult before. Of course he kissed the love-letter he himself had composed for himself with approved lover-like passion.

The other conspirators were at first indignant. But Gretchen managed them, and as they had no wish to lose the advantage of their companion's talent, they proposed that he should write verses for pay, appropriate for marriages, funerals and what not.

Hätschelhans was associating with youths who had to earn their bread, whose pleasures were measured by their earnings; moreover Herr Goethe never supplied his son liberally with

ready cash, therefore the boy entered, not unwillingly, into this scheme.

His passion for Gretchen encouraged him in it. She for her part was much interested, indeed she became quite fond of her talented boy-lover, though apparently she kept his enthusiasm well in check.

After a time another young man joined the company, and unfortunately there was far more of the rogue than the jester about the new associate of this society of young fools. He realised at once with a rogue's quick scent for game that capital was to be made out of the fine, talented, conceited little gentleman who came so innocently a love-making.

He ingratiated himself with Hätschelhans by appearing to regard him as a man of importance. Why should he not use his great influence with the Schultheiss of Frankfurt to obtain a poor comrade some small civic appointment whereby to gain at least an honest livelihood?

Hätschelhans, whatever were his faults, had a pitying heart. Never in his long life could he resist the claims of distress. A trifle proud of his supposed influence yet a trifle doubtful in his own mind of his power, he was at last persuaded to interview the Schultheiss.

Somewhat in awe of his reserved and prophetic grandfather, the boy chose his opportunity

with a child's shrewdness, that is to say, when the Schultheiss had finished his good midday dinner and was busy in the garden, with his beloved fruit and flowers. Hätschelhans first began to help him zealously with the finding of grubs and obnoxious insects, and then when grandfather and grandson were in tune over a common interest, the little humbug made his request.

The old man in the rich garden-gloves paused, before nipping off a false shoot, looked narrowly into the brown, eager eyes and demanded what the boy could say of the applicant.

Hätschelhans told him the little he knew, speaking with the warm, undoubting friendship of his age, *not*, of course, mentioning Gretchen, that is understood.

"If he has merit and good references," answered the old gentleman, "I will show him favours," adding affectionately, "for his sake and yours."

Hätschelhans was satisfied, and boylike almost forgot the matter, hearing nothing further.

Then came busy and enjoyable days, full to the brim of pleasure and bustle.

Another coronation, the second since that one when Frau Aja, a maid of eleven, fell in love with the old Kaiser Karl Albert, was about to

take place. The Archduke Joseph was to be crowned King of Rome.

Herr Rath Goethe took an active part in arranging the ceremonies, in devising fresh honours and—a task after his formal heart—in hunting the archives for precedents and authority. He had, moreover, to establish a novel and much less irritating "billeting," for the lodging of the ambassadors and their respective suites.

Again the Goethe house was called into requisition. This time there was almost more bustle and crowding than during the residence of the King's lieutenant, but the hot feelings of indignation at compulsory service were not roused.

Hätschelhans was very busy, for his father constantly required the help of his quick-witted, intelligent son, and the lover had scant time to devote to his mistress.

The Schultheiss was up to his eyes in receptions, councils, and conferences, and the aspirant for office appeared to be forgotten.

The national excitement put a stop to all regular study, and the Rath merely required from his son a careful report of all that was going forward.

This exactly fell in with the boy's state of mind. Gretchen too should have a full report! This idea inspired and animated his work, and

he also contrived through his influential relatives to obtain for her many tickets of admission for the fine functions that were going on.

Sometimes he was out with her so late that he was compelled to slink home, avoiding his father's peephole in the wall and getting his mother to make excuses for him.

The glamour and splendid excitement of the coronation lasted many days, and came to a brilliant climax when he took Gretchen to see the illuminations.

Then after all this glory of love and splendour came a doleful awakening.

One morning early, Frau Goethe entered her son's room in great distress of mind.

She was generally so cheerful, it was easy to see when anything had gone wrong with her. Her face had an unwonted gravity, her voice an unnatural severity.

"Get up," she said, "and prepare for something disagreeable. It has come out that you have been keeping bad company, and have mixed yourself up with the most dangerous wrong-doing. Your father is beside himself. We have only just been able to persuade him to let some one else deal with the matter. Stay in your room and wait for what happens. Rath Schneider is coming to you; both your father and the legal authorities have commissioned him

to see into things, for the affair has been taken up by the magistrates and may take a very bad turn."

Here was a termination to those golden hours of love's young dream! Hätschelhans, knowing himself guiltless, could not but feel indignant and uneasy.

By-and-by that trusty family friend, who had once so nearly fallen out with his father over Klopstock's *Messiah*, came into the room; tears stood in the man's eyes: evidently the business was being taken very seriously. He took the boy by the arm, saying, "I am terribly grieved to have to come to you about such a thing. I did not think you *could* have done so wrong. But what will not bad companions and example do? By these a well-brought-up youth may be led step by step into crime."

"I am conscious of no crime," answered Wolfgang indignantly, "nor of having been in bad company either." To think that the lovely and good Gretchen should be included in that term!

The Rath interrupted him sternly.

"We want no defence," he announced, "but a straightforward confession from you."

"What do you want to know then?" asked Hätschelhans sulkily.

His judge sat down, drew out a paper and began the examination.

"Did you not recommend N. N. to your grandfather as a candidate for a certain post?"

Wolfgang acknowledged that he had done so.

"In what company did you make his acquaintance?"

Hätschelhans hesitated, not wishing to implicate his friends, Gretchen's cousins.

"Silence will not help you in the least," said his examiner sternly, "for all is thoroughly known."

"What is known?" demanded the boy.

"That this fellow was introduced to you by others like him." The Rath named three persons, whom the boy could honestly deny ever having seen or even having heard mentioned.

"You don't know them?" cried the angry examiner; "but you have had frequent meetings with them!"

"I don't know them at all; as I told you, except the first, I don't know them and have never met them in any house." Thus the accused persisted.

"Have you not often been in —— Street?"

"Never."

At last the well-meaning old gentleman lost patience with what he imagined to be obstinacy.

"You are repaying my goodwill and confidence very ill," he declared. "I came to save you. You cannot deny that you composed letters for

these people or for their accomplices. I came to save you, for it is with nothing less than forging handwriting, falsifying wills, counterfeiting bonds that you are charged. I have come, not alone as a friend of your father, I have come in the name and at the order of the authorities, who, in consideration for your family and your youth, would willingly spare you and some other youths who have been misled in the same way."

He mentioned several, none of whom was among those with whom young Goethe associated. Moreover the circumstances he related did not coincide, though they were very similar to those of Wolfgang's adventure. Wolfgang began to hope he could shield his companions and spare his beloved.

But the worthy man became more and more urgent. It was not to be denied that the boy had often returned home late, that he had managed to obtain a latch-key, that he had been seen more than once at places of entertainment with people of a common order and of questionable appearance, that girls had been mixed up in the business—in a word, all appeared to have come to light except the names of those concerned.

"Don't," entreated his well-meaning friend, "let me leave you thus. The affair will brook no delay; directly I go, some one else will come

who will not deal so leniently with you. Don't make bad worse by obstinacy."

The boy saw in imagination, his friends, his Gretchen, imprisoned, tried, punished, disgraced. It passed through his troubled mind in a flash that although their dealings with him had always been fair, they might, at any rate some of them, have got into some scrape, yet betray them he would not.

"I myself," he declared at length, "am quite unconscious of guilt. I am not the least afraid for myself, but it is just possible that my friends may have done something not quite legal. They may be hunted out, convicted, punished on my evidence. I have nothing whatever on my mind now, and I don't mean to commit the sin of treachery to those who have been so kind and friendly to me."

But his tormentor would not let him finish; he cried excitedly:

"Yes, they shall be found out. The rascals met in three houses; one has already been routed out: the others are at this very moment being searched. Save yourself by an honest confession from a judicial trial and all that wretched business."

The Rath made ready to depart.

What use was further silence? Hätschelhans still hoped to spare his comrades, knowing that their meetings had involved no crime.

"Sit down again," he cried, drawing his friend back from the door. "I will tell all and set your and my own heart at rest. Only one thing I entreat from this moment, you will not doubt my truthfulness."

Wolfgang then told the whole story, at first calmly and collectedly; but as all came before his memory, the innocent pleasures, the many cheerful hours, all, as it were, brought up for judgment, his feelings got the upper hand, he burst into a storm of uncontrollable, passionate grief.

The friend, who hoped the desired secret was now coming, for he imagined the boy's emotion was induced by having to confess something dreadful, tried to calm him. At last the miserable boy declared there was nothing more to tell, adding passionately that if his friends were treated with the least severity, he would do himself an injury, that none should prevent it.

The old gentleman, unable to get anything more from the child, left the room.

Then Hätschelhans gave way entirely. He reproached himself for having confessed so much; all their fun and mischief would be misrepresented and made criminal.

Such ideas hurried through his excited brain, spurring and sharpening his torment; he threw himself on the floor and wept bitterly.

By-and-by Cornelia, the little sister companion of his boyish joys and sorrows, who had been somewhat forgotten beside Gretchen, stole in and, frightened at her brother's abandoned misery, did all she could to console him. She told him what was passing below stairs, how a magistrate had been with their father, awaiting the friend's report, that they had been closeted together a long time, then the two gentlemen had left in company and seemed very well satisfied, had even been laughing over something, and she thought she had caught the words, "It is all right, the affair is of no importance."

"It is quite true," cried the boy; "the business is of no account to us, to *me*, for I have done nothing wrong, and even if I had, my friends would help me through, but the others, the *others*, who will stand by them?"

Cornelia tried to argue with him, saying that when people wanted to screen those of superior position they had to shield inferiors concerned also.

But he would have none of it. With the lavish extravagance of undisciplined youth, he revelled in the luxury of despair, shut in the solitude of his own room.

Mother and sister did their best for him, and as soon as the father knew how matters stood, he only too readily offered a full pardon, for much

he missed the assistance and brightness of his clever little son. Wolfgang willingly accepted his father's goodwill, for the two understood each other, and to be on ill terms was pleasant to neither, but to join again in the festivities was more than the unhappy young lover could do. What did he care now for kings and princes? All he wished to know was how his comrades were faring.

All his bright gifts of imagination, poetry, and reason were turned to self-torture and morbid thought.

Things went from bad to worse; the day was passed in raving, the night in exhaustion. His passion at last ended in bodily illness.

A doctor was sent for who decreed that, at any cost, his patient's mental anxiety must be relieved.

Then the boy learnt that some young men, a great deal older than himself, had formed a society which began by carrying on all sorts of mysterious doings, for a joke, passed from these mere boyish pranks to tomfoolery with the police, and from this to a species of larking extortion of money and more serious hooliganism.

In this way a perfect little conspiracy had arisen among the members, and this was taken advantage of by older men, who carried things even to forgery and kindred crimes.

Hätschelhans' young friends were found to be

quite guiltless, having only slight acquaintance with the rogues, with the exception of the person who had endeavoured to use Wolfgang's influence with his grandfather. He was one of the worst of the set, and competed for office the better to carry out his evil practices.

Thus far all was satisfactory, but how about Gretchen? What was her fate? Had her good name been breathed on? Such were the questions which tortured her little sweetheart.

The answer that should have brought consolation was the bitterest drop in his cup of misery.

The replies the young girl had given to the examiner were so discreet and sensible that they had delighted the grave magistrates. Nothing but goodness and kindness of heart had been found in her, but—alas for romance!—she had told all about that love-letter straight out, and moreover had added, "I will not deny that I saw him often and gladly; for I looked on him as a child and my liking for him was quite that of an elder sister. I often advised him for his good, and so far from inciting him to doubtful actions, I prevented his taking part in some mischievous jokes which might have led him into trouble."

The lover of fourteen was cured. How could one love a girl who could say publicly she considered one a child and talked about elder sisters?

That the adored Gretchen, certainly not more than two years his senior, should treat him thus, cut him to the quick. The operation cured him.

No more sobbing and raving about such a superior young person. To think he had lain awake all night thinking of her! No, he would be up and doing like a man, he would show her he was no child.

Authorities tell us that this sober-minded little Gretchen has no identity with the sweet, confiding, passionate Gretchen of *Faust.* Yet we are inclined to think that the material pictures of his first love, seen with the fresh earnest gaze of very early youth, were before the great poet's mind when he penned those heart-touching scenes of the lowly-born Gretchen at her spinning-wheel, when life was blameless yet sweet with awakening love, before she realised the awful consequences of her blind self-surrender.

CHAPTER VIII

SON AND DAUGHTER

Denn wir können die Kinder nach unserm Sinne nicht formen ;
So wie Gott sie uns gab, so musz man sie haben und lieben,
Sie erziehen aufs Beste und jeglichen lassen gewähren.
Denn der eine hat die, die anderen andere Gaben ;
Jeder braucht sie, und jeder ist doch nur auf eigene Weise
Gut und glücklich.*

GOETHE'S *Hermann and Dorothea.*

HERR GOETHE'S heart's desire was that his son should be a lawyer. By-and-by he should be a much-respected citizen of the city in which his father had failed to gain appreciation.

Herr Goethe's plan for his son's life appeared to himself highly reasonable. The boy had

* For we cannot our children shape just as we would have them ;
As they are given by God, e'en such must we take them and love them,
Bring them up to the best of our power, and let them their course take.
For one child is endowed with one gift, one with another ;
Each must improve his own and can but be in his own way
Happy and good.

WHEWELL.

certainly remarkable talent and was moreover very pliable; he showed no especial bent for any other profession: there was no objection to the scheme!

Herr Goethe thought himself a lover of art, thought he had a fine judgment for poetry and things of high culture, yet he had not discovered, or, if he had, he obstinately shut his eyes to the fact, that the little son he was trying to mould to his liking, was, from the crown of his brown head to the soles of his little high-heeled shoes, a poet born, that it would be as easy to change a rose-tree into a bramble as to turn Wolfgang Johann Goethe into a lawyer.

Whilst the father was thus with his characteristic method laying down the lines for his son's future, the son was noting silently, yet very decisively, that the dreary path of the law was not the one he must pursue.

"As grandson of the Schultheiss—the chief magistrate," he says, "I was not ignorant of the hidden defects of such a republic. The fruitless indignation of honest men in opposition to those who are to be won, nay even bribed by party, had become only too apparent to me. I hated every kind of injustice above everything, for children are all moral rigorists. My father, who was only concerned in the affairs of the town as a private person, expressed himself pretty freely about many false steps. And did I not see him himself,

after so much study, pains, travel, and manifold culture, at last leading a solitary life, between the four walls of his house, such as I never wished to lead? These considerations lay as a horrible burden on my mind, of which I could only rid myself by making quite a different plan for my life from that which had been laid out for me."

His strong poetic bent he describes thus:

"Indeed the poetic imitation of all that I perceived in myself, in others, and in nature, gave me the liveliest pleasure. I did it with increasing ease, because I did it from instinct, misguided by no criticism; and even when I did not feel quite confident about my productions, I knew they were not worthless, if faulty. If this or that was blamed in my work, it still remained my firm conviction that it would gradually become better and better and that some time or other I should be named with honour, with Hagedorn, Gellert and such men. An academical professorship appeared to me the highest ambition for a young fellow who wished to form his mind."

This is tolerably decisive for a boy of fourteen.

It was towards Göttingen that the would-be poet turned his longing eyes; he wished passionately to sit at the feet of Heyne or Michaelis.

"The stubbornness of my father, who opposed my plans without knowing it, strengthened me in my impiety. I did not feel conscience-stricken when I listened for hours whilst he held forth on

my course of study and life both at the universities and in the world."

The following passage from *Hermann ana Dorothea* probably reflects the relations between the members of the family at that time. The father says:

Must I to-day bear that which so oft is the lot of a father;
That the son's self-will, the mother, all too indulgent
Favours with helpful hand?
Meanwhile thy father finds not a son that
Brings him to honour and wins respect from the rest of his townsmen;
And 'twas so from the first; the mother fed me with vain hope.

Hermann complains thus to the mother:

Oh, 'tis true my father's speech has wounded me deeply,
Never deserved by me, not now, nor ever in time past;
Thus I grew up. And much I bore of my father
Who for want of another would vent his rage upon me oft,
When he vext, came home, with what past at the Council.
Oft-times you have grieved for me. . . .

The mother defends her son:

Father, towards thy son thou art ever unjust, and believe me
'Tis not so that thy wishes of good will ere be accomplisht.

Then follows the passage given at the head of the chapter. She ends thus:

Thus day after day, with scolding and finding of fault, thou
Checkest his spirit and breakest his heart.

WHEWELL.

But the Rath was not to be moved, his son was to go to Leipzig.

So to Leipzig he went, feeling, he tells us, like a prisoner escaping from his dungeon.

Thither there is no need to follow him, no need to watch that headlong, frivolous career, that wild breaking-in of a Pegasus, for thither his mother could only follow him in anxious thought.

We are sure that the large house appeared empty and dull when he, the bright spirit of the family, had left it.

Poor Cornelia had now to bear all the weight of her father's exacting pedagogism hitherto shared with her brother.

The monotonous reading, the weary long practisings, now no longer relieved by the urgent demand of Hätschelhans for a sympathetic listener to his boyish love confessions or poetic effusions, became almost unbearable.

How could she help loving this brilliant brother, who alone broke the tedium of her girl's life. Cornelia tells us herself how much she missed him. She was forced to console herself by his letters and by writing to him. But, alas! pedagogism pursued her even in this her last resort. The indefatigable taskmaster must needs supervise her letters, whereby he hoped to improve her composition in German, nay in French and English, and at the same time he thought to keep an eye on the doings of her corre-

spondent. But this latter, knowing his father well, writes thus to his sister.

"I often see with a smile, how a good, simple girl makes reflections which could come only from an enlightened and experienced man."

Yet at times Wolfgang would turn mentor himself, correcting her composition and style, retailing for her benefit in afternoon letters what he had heard from the professors in the morning. He warns her against too much or trashy reading; of romances he wishes her to read only those of Richardson. He also warns her against the love of chattering gossip. He wants, he says, to bring her up to be the most sensible, well-behaved, agreeable, amiable girl, not only in Frankfurt but in the whole kingdom. Poor Cornelia! Where could she find room for individuality between these exacting masculine influences?

"We were in every way devoted to each other as brother and sister," asserts the poor girl. "I feel his absence most intensely."

The very fact that her nature had much akin to her father's made it difficult for them to work harmoniously.

When the young wife had been the pupil, she had known how, with tact and good temper, to indulge yet hold in check her husband's domina-

tion, but Cornelia lacked her mother's genial adaptability.

A portion of the scene from *Erwin and Elmire* already quoted to illustrate Frau Aja's own upbringing will serve to illustrate her daughter's.

Olimpia—the mother—enters and finds Elmire sitting sadly at a table, on which she leans; the mother evinces a tender displeasure, and tries to cheer her with this sweet little song:

Liebes Kind, was hast du wieder?
Welch ein Kummer druck dich nieder?
Sieh! wie ist der Tag so schön,
Komm, lasz uns in Garten gehn.
War das ein Sehnen,
War das ein Erwarten;
Blüthen doch die Blumen!
Grünte doch mein Garten!
Sieh! die Blumen bluhen all,
Hör es schlagt die Nachtingall.

This song gives so charmingly Frau Aja's joyous manner and her keen zest for simple pleasure, her love for her garden, which was fully inherited by her Hätschelhans, whose garden-house in Weimar by-and-by became as renowned as its master.

For those who cannot read German, we explain that Olimpia asks her daughter tenderly what is the trouble that oppresses her, and by way of consolation talks of the fineness of the day and tells her to come into the garden, asking what desire or longing could not be assuaged by the

blossoming flowers of her garden. Olimpia continues in prose :

"What is the matter? Come, tell me what is the matter? Grieve as long as you like, but I cannot bear silence.

"ELMIRE. Dear mamma, one can't help one's moods.

"OLIMPIA. If it were a mood I wouldn't say a word. When you don't talk of a morning, or when you sulk at table, do I say anything? Was there ever a better household than ours for getting out of each other's way when we are out of temper? No, my darling, you are not expected to laugh when you feel like crying, but I want you not to feel like crying. What's the matter? What do you wish for? Speak, say it out!

"ELMIRE. I—nothing, mamma.

"OLIMPIA. God forbid you should sulk thus for nothing; no, that's not it, but I don't understand it. Always tears in your eyes—are you ill? Won't you tell me?

"ELMIRE. I am cheerful enough. [*She smiles and wipes her eyes.*]

"OLIMPIA. It is a funny kind of cheerfulness. I know well enough what is wrong.

"ELMIRE [*brightly*]. Dear mamma.

"OLIMPIA [*after a pause*]. We are ourselves answerable for all the discontent, all the bad temper of our children. It is the modern education. I have felt it a long time.

"ELMIRE. Dear mamma, you don't regret the care you have spent on me?

"Olimpia. Not that, my daughter. I have often said to your father he wants to make a little prodigy of you. You are not, and will not be happy. [*She ends a little impatiently, patting her daughter's cheek*] *Summa summarum.*"

This *summa summarum* is so characteristic of Frau Aja, it figures so frequently in her letters, that we may be sure it is she who is speaking.

Frau Aja's children were very different in disposition. The boy had all his mother's delight in life. Life was a boon in and for itself. The act of living was a continued joy. The small vexations and discords could only trouble the surface.

With the girl it was quite otherwise. With great intellectual gifts, she had neither the good looks nor the personal charm of her brother. She morbidly exaggerated the small worries of existence. The brother thus describes his poor sister's persecutions during his absence:

"After my departure, my father devoted his whole didactic talent to my sister, and had in a house, since the peace, even free from lodgers, almost completely shut her off from going out to recreate herself. She had to work and grind alternately at French, Italian, and English, and as well he made her practise on the clavichord a great part of the day. Writing also was not neglected, and I very soon noticed that he directed her correspondence with me, so that his teaching should reach me through her pen.

My sister was and always remained an indefinable being, the most singular mixture of strength and weakness, of obstinacy and submission, which characteristics sometimes worked harmoniously, sometimes were separated by her will and inclination. Thus she turned towards my father a hardness that quite horrified me, for she could not forgive him for cutting her off or spoiling for her, for these three long years, so many innocent enjoyments. She would not acknowledge one of his many good and excellent qualities. She did all that he ordered and arranged, but in the most disagreeable manner. She did everything in the established routine, but not a bit more or less. She did nothing from love or a wish to please. But since she as much as any one was a being who needed love, she turned entirely to me."

Though not pretty, Cornelia had no personal defect, was tall, well-grown and elegant, had a certain natural dignity and gentleness, but her expression showed that she was not at peace with herself, nor could be so. Her eyes, not beautiful, were very expressive, and for those she loved her glance had something of tender longing not easily described. Rich and full she seemed to desire only to give, not to ask.

Unfortunately, as too often happens with girls who are conscious of unusual intellectual power, though she had not the feminine art of making the best of her appearance, she had to the full,

feminine sensitiveness about it, in fact a morbidly accentuated sensitiveness.

She was, at the period of her brother's sojourn in Leipzig, at the romantic age of girlhood, when the characters, more or less true to nature, who people the pages of a novel seem more real, are more beloved, more admired, than the human beings of actual existence.

A passage from her diary, written in French, will give us a very fair picture of her state of mind, which she confided more openly to the pages of her diary than to parents or friends:

"Je donnerais tout au monde pour pouvoir parvenir dans plusieurs années à imiter tant soit peu l'excellente Miss Byron.* L'imiter? Folle que je suis, le puis-je? Je m'estimerais assez heureuse d'avoir la vingtième partie de l'esprit, de la beauté de cette admirable dame, car alors je serais une aimable fille; c'est ce souhait que me tient au cœur jour et nuit. Je serais à blâme si je désirais d'être une grande beauté; seulement un peu de finesse dans les traits, un teint uni, et puis cette grâce douce qui enchante au premier coup de vue; voilà tout. Cependant ce n'est pas et ne sera jamais, quoi que je puisse faire et souhaiter; ainsi il voudra mieux de cultiver l'esprit et tâcher d'être supportable, du moins de ce côté là."

This self-revelation is pathetic, because it repre-

* One of Richardson's heroines.

sents what goes on in many a silly girl's heart at an age that has leisure to indulge the morbid luxury of imaginary woe, before real trouble has shown what actually matters in life.

It is regrettable that in Cornelia Goethe's case this morbid state became chronic; she never learnt the lesson that to accept and make the best of whatever life brings is the only possible way of attaining the peace of mind that strengthens and exalts the soul and brings it at last to the haven where it fain would be.

The Goethe household then, during the period from 1763 to 1768, was, though outwardly peaceful, yet in truth the scene of much heartburning and discontent. Frau Aja must have needed all her simple philosophy to keep things from becoming intolerable.

Matters came to a climax when, in September 1768, the son returned home, not as a successful student far on the way to become a successful jurist—as his father had hoped, not without justification in the youth's brilliant talent—but sick and despondent, in mind and body, determined not to follow the path his father pointed out, yet having no other profession in view, for a poet before he has made himself heard is without a place among his contemporaries.

Indeed, young Goethe was sick almost to death. His mother and sister were so shocked

at his appearance that their distress unmanned him and there was quite a scene on his arrival.

No sooner was he recovering from the first ailment than another threatened him with almost more serious consequences.

The Herr Rath, made irritable, as some natures are, by anxiety, grew impatient with the invalid and the tedium of convalescence. His impatience was sometimes displayed in a manner neither kind nor just. The son, also irritable through weakness and depression, took offence easily.

The young man, fresh and opinionative from the university, paraded his architectural knowledge in a way well qualified to displease his father. He found fault with the building of the house which was the old man's especial pride, with the staircase that led from landing to landing. The painful interview between his father and Count de Thoranc, he declared, could never have taken place had the staircase been at the side, with a door to each story, as in Leipzig houses. He criticised the scroll-work of the looking-glass frames. No doubt, in the fashion of the period, they were hideous enough, still it was not kind to point that out to the proud possessor.

But, however disappointed and vexed the father was, the mother only loved her Hätschelhans the more for his weakness and dependence.

And Cornelia devoted herself entirely to the

invalid, only too glad to escape her father's teaching ; in all kinds of ways she tried to relieve the tedium of illness, to amuse and cheer. Frau Aja's kitchen furnished dainties for his failing appetite.

Thus, in this time of disappointment and sickness, mother, son, and daughter were drawn closely together, whilst the father stood aloof, more respected than loved.

CHAPTER IX

RATH AND THAT*

> Frommigkeit ist kein Zweck, sondern ein Mittel, um durch die reinste Gemüthsruhe zur höchsten Kultur zu gelangen.†
>
> GOETHE'S *Sprüche in Prosa.*

THIS very serious illness of her only and so dearly loved son could not but stir Frau Aja's nature to its inmost depths. She found consolation in her religion. Her faith was, in its outward expression, of that simple, almost childlike type which accepts and questions not, which is satisfied with such crude oracular guidance as she imagined might be obtained by the drawing of lots, or from a passage indicated at random by a key thrust between the leaves of a Bible.

The outward expression of her faith was of small consequence, since her soul had true and full dependence on the living God behind all religion.

* Council and action.

† Piety is no goal, but only a means by which, through purest calm of mind, to reach to highest culture.

Consulting her Bible by the chance method, in this her dire strait, she lighted on the passage :

" They shall again plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria ; they shall plant and pipe thereto."—*Jeremiah* xxxi. 5.

Her cheerful, confident love interpreted this as an omen of good hope, for how could she ever plant her vineyard again with joy and music if her Hätschelhans were to be taken from her ?

Frau Goethe was, of course, consulting Luther's version of the Scriptures, which runs thus :

" Du sollst wiederum Weinberge pflanzen an den Bergen Samarias ; pflanzen wird man, und dazu pfeifen."

Her tenderness and care of her loved one was shared by one who loved him almost as dearly, by the friend already mentioned, the saintly Fräulein von Klettenberg. The mother left the care of the suffering spirit almost entirely to this spiritual nurse, whilst her practical self attended to his bodily wants.

The young man himself, with his acute appreciation of character, recognised their several spheres when he nicknamed his mother *That*, or *Action*, his friend *Rath*, or *Counsel*.

Let us hear his own description of this friend in need. He tells us :

"She was tenderly formed, of middle height, and her naturally earnest behaviour had been made more pleasing by contact with the cultivated society of the world and the court. Her dainty, neat attire recalled the dress of the Herrnhuters, to which sect she belonged. Her cheerfulness and calmness never failed her; she regarded the illness from which she was suffering as a necessary condition of her transitory earthly existence; she suffered with infinite patience, and, in the intervals of pain, she was lively and talkative. Her favourite, indeed almost her only topic, was the moral experience which a man who observes his inner life can go through, to which were added the religious views that, in a very agreeable and genial manner, she formed from considering the natural and supernatural."

Frau Aja had already become subject to this impressive personality, and it was inevitable that the susceptible mind of the young Goethe, sensitised by illness, should feel its influence. Many were the earnest conversations and discussions they had, this saintly lady and the wild young student.

The sacred writings had always possessed powerful attraction for Wolfgang's poetic temperament. The splendid language, the many-sidedness, the glorious humanity of the Bible had made it one of his most careful studies. From his earliest childhood the relation of God to man had exercised his thoughts. The story of

how he built an altar out of a lacquered music-stand, covered with all his boyish treasures, on which at sunrise, in lonely and enthusiastic rapture, he burnt some sweet-smelling pastilles as a sacrifice to the God of Nature, his piteous disappointment when his elementary devotion was rewarded by scorched lacquer, since he had forgotten to burn his sacrifice in a porcelain saucer, are well known. So too is the effect of the terrible Lisbon earthquake on the mind of the six-year-old child, who had painfully to think out for himself an explanation of such a tragedy allowed by a God of Love.

"After all," he had told his father, as the result of his mental struggle, "everything may be much simpler than the clergyman thinks. God will well know, that the immortal soul can receive no injury in mortal life."

Thus the six-year-old child satisfied himself, though his mother believed the rebellious excitement caused by the catastrophe found outlet, years later, in the splendid fragment *Prometheus.*

These anecdotes show that his nature had a strong religious bent. Certain it is that he had a very sincere affection for his mother's friend. He writes at the beginning of the fifteenth book of the autobiography, speaking of a later period of his life:

"From such manifold distractions, which yet give rise to many earnest, yes, religious, observations, I ever returned to my noble friend von Klettenberg, whose presence, at any rate for the moment, calmed my passionate striving and longing in all directions, and to whom, of all people except my sister, I most preferred to give an account of my designs. I could not but observe that, from time to time, her health failed, but I disguised it from myself, and could do so more easily since her cheerfulness increased with illness. She would sit neatly dressed in her seat by the window, listening to my stories about my excursions kindly, and to what I read to her. I often made sketches to help my descriptions of the country I had seen.

"One evening at sunset she appeared to me as if transfigured, so that I could not resist making such a picture as my powers would allow of her person and the objects in the room that surrounded her, which in the hands of such an artist as Kersting would have been very charming. I sent it to an absent friend and added these verses by way of commentary:

"Sieh in diesem Trauberspiegel
Einen Traum, wie lieb und gut,
Unter ihres Gottes Flügel
Unsre Freundin leidend ruht.

"Schaue, wie sie sich hinüber
Aus des Lebens Wage stritt;
Sieh dein Bild ihr gegenüber
Und den Gott, der für euch litt.

"Fühle, was ich in dem Weben
Dieser Himmelsluft gefühlt,
Als mit ungeduld'gen Streben
Ich die Zeichnung hingewühlt." *

These lovely verses show most characteristically how Goethe's poetry was the direct expression of his feeling, he says:

"That I in these strophes, as indeed I was wont to do, represented myself as an alien, a stranger, even as a heathen, was not distasteful to her; on the contrary, she assured me that she liked me better so, than when I made use of Christian phraseology, which never rightly suited me."

Fräulein von Klettenberg was right. Such religion as hers and Frau Aja's is the precious

* In this magic glass reflected,
See a vision, mild and bless'd
By the wing of God protected,
See our friend while suffering rest.

Mark, how her endeavours bore her
From life's waves, to realms above
See thine image stand before her,
And the God, who died from love.

Feel what I, amid the floating
Of that heavenly ether, knew
When the first impression noting,
Hastily this sketch I drew.

Trans. OXENFORD.

casket which safeguards the jewel beyond price. But she truly saw that Goethe was not and could not be orthodox. His nature was too wide-spreading, too deeply rooted in the Universal *das Ganze* for that.

And, indeed, why is man surprised that he cannot light the infinite with the small rushlight of human knowledge? He may build a barn round his taper and think it bright, but let him not forget the vaster temple.

The difference in the natures of disciple and saintly instructress, radical though it was, did not affect, indeed perhaps heightened, their friendship. Fräulein von Klettenberg truly loved her handsome, talented, young relative.

"When our Wolfgang goes to Maintz, he brings back more information than others who come from Paris or London," she was wont to declare.

His love and admiration for *her* are fitly immortalised in that celebrated episode of *Wilhelm Meister, Die Bekentnisse eine schöne Seele*, for which his mother thus thanks him in a letter dated 1875:

"Many thanks for having created such a beautiful memorial, after so many years, to the never-to-be-forgotten K. Thus her influence prevails even after death."

Although we shall need to mention Fräulein

von Klettenberg later in connection with the Goethe family, we may aptly conclude this chapter with a letter of Frau Aja's to Lavater, describing the last hours of their mutual friend.

FRANKFURT, 26th *Xber*, 74.

My dear Friend,—You wish to know the whole course of the illness and the death of our Fräulein Klettenberg? A painful commission, I can assure you. My soul is so lost in sorrow that I know not what to do. I know I shall see her again; but now, I want her now! My counsellor, into whose bosom I could pour out everything, has passed to that blessedness she spoke of so often with rapture. You are still here, I am still here—but a day will come when she will rise again. Then shall we all arise, and rejoice with an unspeakably great joy! Amen.

On the 7th Xber we were together very pleasantly. I have not seen her so cheerful for a long time; not the slightest thought of illness occurred to me. At eight o'clock we separated. In the night a severe chill, followed by fever, seized her. I heard nothing about it on the 8th, on the 9th she sent early to tell me she was ill; when I reached her, I found her pretty well; she thought herself it was nothing; on the 10th she was worse, but seemed better again in the night. I did not leave her. On the 11th, when the doctor came into the room, I ran to meet him joyfully—"She is better," I said. "God grant it," said he, "but we are not over the hill yet." On the 12th, as soon as I came in to her early in

the morning, she said, "Good night; Räthin, I am dying!" I could not speak for weeping. She signed to me to come nearer, pressed my hand and said, "Walk in His sight and be faithful"—looked at me with an unspeakably cheerful face and was very calm and happy.

In the afternoon some Christian friends came to her. We asked if she could bear it, if we sang some Christian verses. "Oh yes," she said. We sang "Come, it is the voice of the Bride": and she asked for "The Spirit of Christ sanctifies me." A friend asked her, "How do you feel at the thought of death?" "I am so full of joy that the poor tabernacle will hardly contain it: it will break through," she said. I sang from a song: "This is nothing but the form of death, the sting has gone, Hallelujah!"

In the evening, when the other friends had gone and I was sitting alone with her, she said, "The doctor." I thought she meant the medical man, and said, "He has gone away." "No," she said, and pointed to me. "My doctor,* you mean?" she nodded. "Ach," said I, "he so little thought that you would die that he has commissioned me to tell you that to-morrow he is going with the Prince to Maintz. I have tried three times to prepare him for your death, but it is of no use. 'She is not going to die,' he always says: 'it couldn't be, she will not die.'" She smiled: "Bid him adieu; he is very dear to me." "Ah, my best one," I said, "you are now

* At this time young Goethe had taken his degree. Fräulein von Klettenberg and Frau Aja talked of him as "The Doctor," or "Doctor Wolf."

going to the immortality which you have so often already enjoyed in spirit. I rejoice at your blessedness and rest with all my heart. But I have to remain behind. When you are in Heaven, still think of your friends left behind. Oh think then of your true Räthin." She made a sign with her head that she would. I stayed the night with her. Tea, which she liked best to drink in health, was also in these last days her chief refreshment. This night was very bearable. She had no great pain, and when one saw the friendliness on her face one would hardly believe that she was so near her end. My dear son, Lavater, has seen her friendly glance, and will have a notion of it. The next day, as on the 13th, her friends came again. We seated ourselves round her bed, meaning to stay with our dear friend till the end. She looked at us and smiled. "Love one another" was her last loving command. As she loved singing above everything, we sang some verses of the song, "Christ's blood and righteousness," &c.

We spoke little so as not to tire her; now and again an apt saying or a pretty verse from a pretty song. At eight o'clock came the doctor, Dr. Metz, a just man, and one of her best friends, who would have given all he possessed to keep her in life. I said to him, "Dear Herr Dr., is it certain that our friend must die? Is there nothing more you can do to help her?" "Frau Räthin," said he in his usual earnest manner, "when Elijah was caught up to Heaven the children of the prophets came to Elisha and said: 'Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from

thy head to-day?' And he said, 'Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.'" Then he went to the bed and took such a Christian farewell that it touched us all to the soul; but he promised to return in the afternoon, not as physician, because his skill was at an end, but as a friend. At half-past eleven she said, "It is better now; I have no more pain," arranged herself in bed and said in a failing voice, "Good night." Then she was still, did not speak again, and, at twelve o'clock, the released spirit took farewell of the body.

My soul dies with this good woman! We remained quiet some minutes. A friend, less overcome with pain than the rest, said a beautiful prayer. . . . Then I had to repeat from the seventeenth chapter of John, and the text "Whoso believeth on me, shall never see death; I am the resurrection and the life," and other such passages which were particularly dear to her. . . .

Here, dear friend, you have the whole sad story. Keep me a place in your friendly heart, and rest assured that I am till the grave and will be beyond

Your true friend
E. Goethe.

We have given this long letter almost entire because it at once shows Frau Aja's attitude towards religion, because it gives an idea of her descriptive powers, of her warmth of affection, because it at once acquits her of the accusation

brought against her as against her son, of selfishly shunning painful scenes, when in fact she merely shunned painful and unnecessary dwelling on them, and, lastly, because of its great interest in connection with Fräulein von Klettenberg, *Die schöne Seele*.

CHAPTER X

FRAU AJA

Viele gäste wünsch' ich heut
Mir zu meinem Tische!
Speisen sind genug bereit
Vögel, Wild und Fische
Eingeladen sind sie ja,
Haben's angenommen.
Hänschen, geh und sieh dich um!
Sieh mir, ob sie kommen! *

GOETHE.

AT length this long period of disappointment and depression came to an end, Wolfgang fully recovered, and was once again able to face life. "I felt my health restored," he says, "but still more my youthful spirit. I longed to escape from the paternal roof." So it was decided that he should continue his education at Strasburg University.

* Many guests I have engaged
To dine with me this day!
Roasts enough I have arranged,
Fishes, birds and game.
Invited they have surely been,
Surely have accepted.
Hanschen go and look about!
Tell me are they yet without!
(*Very free translation.*)

Arrived at Strasburg the young poet, feeling the delightful glow of health after the chill of long illness, set himself with zest, and at first with enjoyment, to the study that his father had chosen for him. He wrote to his friend Fräulein von Klettenberg that jurisprudence was beginning to please him, that it was an acquired taste, as the taste for Merseburg beer, and he was acquiring it.

Whether he had a taste for it or not, he managed to obtain the desired degree and returned home a full-fledged Doctor, to the intense delight of the old Rath, who now saw his son already on the first rung of the ladder which reached to respect and office, and to the pride and relief of his mother, who silently hoped for still higher things.

There was no more dullness in the large Goethe house, for the young Doctor's genius had been recognised. The rising poet was soon the centre of the youthful intellect of the period.

Very soon his many and varied friends found their way to number twenty-three Hirsch Graben, into Frau Aja's snug dining-room, and sat themselves down at Frau Aja's henceforth famous round table, to enjoy her good cheer, drink her sparkling Rhine wine, and listen to her lively stories or her kind advice.

Both father and mother heartily welcomed any one at a word from their young Doctor.

This was a very happy period for Frau Aja. She says, in a letter to a friend, that it has always been a great pleasure to her to have clever men around her. To entertain her son's friends gave scope to her talent of hospitality and to her kindness of heart, though at times Doctor Wolf * put it to the utmost test, as when he proposed introducing a vagrant harp-player into her orderly household! We can imagine her consternation. What would the irritable Herr Rath say? A strolling minstrel who gained a pitiful livelihood by going from hostel to hostel with his harp, to be quartered in a respectable house! At length, with her customary tact, she thought of a way out of the dilemma. She took a lodging in the town, at her own expense, for her son's inconvenient *protégé*, who no doubt felt more at home than he could have done in her spotless, orderly kitchen.

The quiet rooms where the Herrnhuters had lately sung their psalms and spiritual songs now rang with the jolly mirth of youth. The Doctor Wolf who had written the "Religious Odes" for Fräulein von Klettenberg was now the wild Bruder Wolf of the students.

Ich hab mein Sach auf Nichts gestellt,
Juchhé!
Drum ist's so wohl mir in der Welt,
Juchhé!

* Name for Goethe among his intimate friends.

FRAU AJA

Und wer will mein Camerade seyn
Der stosse mit an, der stimme mit ein
Bei dieser Neige Wein.
Juchhé! Juchhé! Juchhé! *

It was at this time that, as now to be explained, Goethe's mother received the name Frau Aja, which she liked so well that she adopted it for signature.

It suited her, for it connected her joyous nature with the sparkle of the Rhine wine of her native land, for she

". . . Joyed in the thoughts of the vintage,
And of the day when all the place in festival uproar,
Gathers and treads the grapes and fills the vats with sweet must,
Then comes eve and from all sides and in every corner,
Fireworks crackle and blaze, the honour due to the vintage.
WHEWELL: *Hermann and Dorothea.*

Goethe says:

Just as wine gives to the country where it is grown and drunk a certain free character, so do these days of vintage, because they close the summer and open winter, spread an incredible cheerfulness around.

* Now I my heart on naught have set;
Hurrah!
That's why so well thro' the world I get;
Hurrah!
And he that will my comrade be
Let him clink his glass, and then may he
Drink out the wine with me.
Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!
GOETHE. (*Trans.* DULCKEN.)

The poet's genius, brilliant yet erratic, drew all the most excitable minds of Germany into its sphere. All the wild talent made lawless by the influence of Rousseau looked to the rising poet for expression.

Among the reckless throng, more reckless than the rest, were the two brothers, Counts von Stolberg.

On their way to Switzerland with Count Haugwitz they passed through Frankfurt, and, though they made pretence of stopping at an inn, the attraction of their friend's society brought them often to the Goethe house, and that of his mother's good cheer brought them often to the Goethe table.

The Herr Rath was so proud of his young Doctor that he put up with the extravagances of the wild crew.

Wonderful friendships were those of these glorious youths, full of the glad wine of life, and at first all went well; guests and hosts were pleased with each other. But by-and-by the young men gave expression to the revolutionary ideas which were at that time driving men from their senses; they grew loud and stormy in their denunciations of governments and tyrants; indeed, they grew boodthirsty.

The Herr Rath shook his head before the torrent. The Frau Rath had hardly heard of

tyrants, except those in the wonderful copper-plates in *Gottfried's Chronicle*, where they appeared as monsters.

But she saw that the young men were getting out of hand, and she was by no means certain of her husband's temper. It was time to turn conversation into lighter channels, so downstairs she went, keys in hand, to her well-filled cellar, where the bright wine lay in the darkness, the vintages of years gone by, of 1706, 19, 26, 48, possibly the remainder of the stock of the host of the Hôtel Zum Weidenhof, Bruder Wolf's grandfather. These she watched over herself, producing them only at high festivals.

She chose some of the richest tint and decanted it into her shining, cut-glass decanters. These she set before her noisy guests. "Here is the true tyrant's blood," she cried. "Revel in it as you will, but leave thoughts of murder outside my house."

"Tyrant's blood, truly," cried the quick Wolfgang: "there is no greater tyrant than he whose heart's blood is now before you. Enjoy it but with measure, for beware lest he enthrall you with his sweet flavour and spirit. Wine is the universal tyrant that must be dethroned."

The scene of the mother bringing her best wine and setting it before the wild youths suggested to their poetic fancies the legend of *Frau Aja.*

The Mother of Goethe

Frau Aja was the sister of Charlemagne. She was the wife of Count Aymon, and the mother of four sons. One of these sons had by mishap slain one of the Emperor's sons in a brawl. He therefore, with his brothers, had to flee for safety to the forest of Ardennes, and to lie in hiding there because of the Emperor's fierce wrath.

The Emperor, not being able to find the murderer, seized on their father Aymon, and kept him as a hostage, forcing him to swear to deliver up his sons to vengeance should they dare to return.

After weary years of exile they ventured to revisit the paternal home, disguised as pilgrims. Frau Aja, the mother, overjoyed to see her sons, brought food and the best wine from her cellar to refresh them and gladden their weariness, so that they went on their way strenghtened and unmolested.

Thus from her bright wine did Frau Aja get her name. Years after, writing to her son, she tells him of a visit from Prince Constantine and his tutor :

"Prince Constantine with his tutor has just appeared—fresh, healthy, and delighted with our country and situation, particularly with the Main. We were uncommonly merry and comfortable together. You may easily imagine that Frau Aja *ajated*, but still in moderation and becomingly."

And she signs herself Frau Aja.

At rather a later period, one of her guests thus recalls the memory of her hospitality and the sociability of her round table:

"How I felt at your table I cannot describe, with Goethe's dear parents and Wieland and Merck. What refinement was there: since then how clear human nature has become to me. I never enjoyed myself so much. I was so happy, I quite forgot where I was—you must have often thought so. How I laughed! We also had many conversations, so earnest and thoughtful as almost to bring tears. Remember me to dear Herr Rath. *O casa! O casa sancta!*

An anecdote will serve to show how entirely young Goethe's illness had given place to vigorous, joyous health.

One bright, frosty morning he burst into the room where Frau Aja and her friends were chatting.

"Mother," he cried, "you have never seen me skate, and the weather is glorious."

"I put on my crimson fur-lined cloak," Frau Aja tells us, "with the long train and golden clasps, and we drove out. There skated my son, like an arrow, in and out the other skaters. His cheeks glowed with the wind, which had blown the powder out of his brown hair."

Overbrimming with spirits, his eye caught the

delicious crimson of his mother's cloak. He came to the side of her carriage, with mischievous coaxing in his bright smile.

"Well," she asked, "what do you want?"

"Lend me your cloak: you won't be cold in the carriage."

"You won't put it on?"

"Won't I?"

So he did, and, flinging the train over his arm, away he flew, to the loving eyes that watched him as if he were a son of the gods.

"Never shall I forget him," she declares, "as he darted in and out the arches of the bridge, the wind carrying the bright crimson drapery behind him as he flew."

He was every inch a poet in his abandonment to glowing life:

> Winged with the joy of health
> Far along the shore have I cover'd
> The sparkling crystal with a track of white.

He quotes from his, and his mother's, favourite Klopstock:

> How does the winter's declining day
> Softly illumine the lake! The night has cast
> The glittering frost, like stars, upon it!

"If other exertions tire the body, this lends it continually renewed force," he says. How he gloried in the broad fields of ice, the frozen meadows, glittering and white under the radiance of a full moon, the rushing of the night wind

meeting him as he flew, the solemn thunder of the ice as the water flowed from under it."

Shall we call young Goethe vain? He would not have resented the accusation.

"That which men call vanity [*Eitelkeit*]," he declares, "has never offended me. On the contrary, I have allowed myself to be vain, that is to say, to give forth unconcernedly that which pleased me in myself."

And again:

"The Germans misapply the word 'vain' only too often; for really it conveys the idea of emptiness, and should only be bestowed on those who cannot dissemble their satisfaction with their own nothingness, their contentment with a hollow existence."

The two aspects of the poet revealed in this and in the last chapter—his earnestness and frivolity—may surprise, even repel many. Yet both were true, the key-note of his character was his universal response to all that was human.

"Homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto,"* once said the Roman poet, and the best poets of all ages have endorsed the dictum.

* I am a man; I deem nothing human indifferent to me. TERENTIUS.

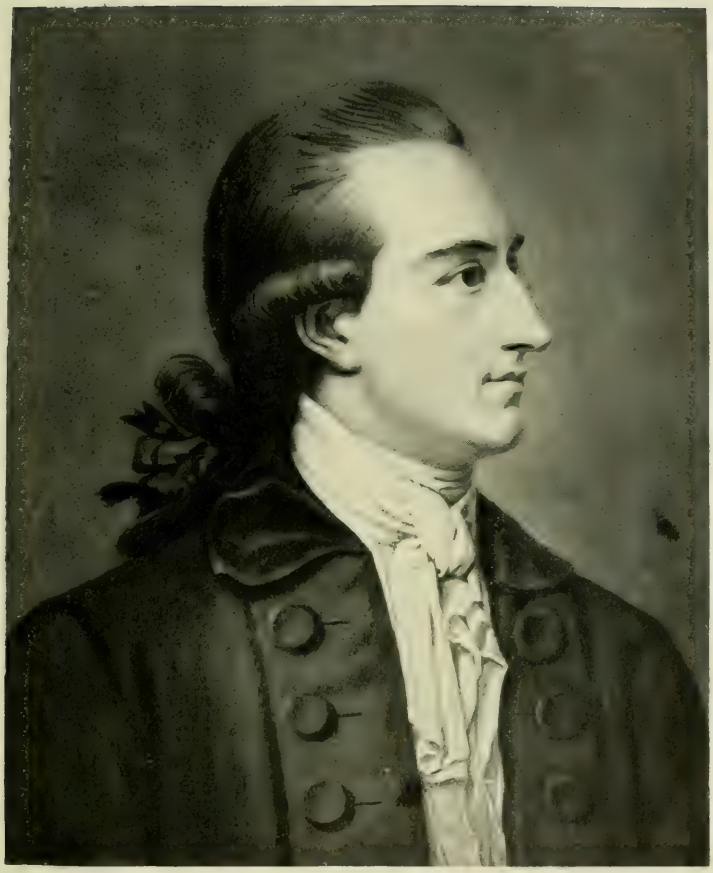
CHAPTER XI

DR. WOLF

> As, by invisible spirits goaded, the sunhorses of time bear our fate's light chariot forward, there is nothing for us but to hold the reins fast and guide the wheels, now right, now left, to avoid a stone here or a precipice there. Whither it goes who knows? Who indeed remembers from whence it set out? GOETHE'S *Egmont.*

THE sister also felt the change in her brother. Her patient, the dependent invalid, was transfigured by exuberant health and academic success into the promising, brilliant Doctor Wolf, whose society was sought by men of learning and rank. Yet, in spite of this change, she was still his adviser and confidante: as she had shared and cheered his depression, so she was now called upon to join in his enthusiasm and his hopes.

Once more his changing fancy glanced from history to poetry, from fact to fiction, from law to religion, with a zest that was contagious and exhilarating. How enjoyable were the long talks over his new hero, *Götz von Berlichingen*, the



"DR. WOLF"
(From the painting by May)

Knight with the Iron Hand, the patriot and true soldier of the Middle Ages ; how she longed to see his brilliant projects crystallised into clear and definite shape.

An Englishman * travelling in Germany visited Frau Goethe, and tells us how the young man burst into the room one evening, regardless of a stranger's presence, claiming his mother's interest.

"Mother," he cried, "I have found a splendid book in the library of which won't I make something! What eyes the Philistines will make over the Knight with the Iron Hand! That is a noble thing, that iron hand."

But it was Cornelia who held his volatile mind to its purpose, who encouraged, incited, bantered until the drama was evolved.

No one will be surprised at the fact that the clever Cornelia, the close companion of her fascinating brother, became the wife of Johann Schlosser, one of his university friends, and left the parental home to live in the distant town of Emmendingen in the Black Forest.

When Frau Aja was forty-four, her son twenty-six, in the year 1775, an event occurred which brought a permanent change into the *bürgerliches* house in the Hirsch Graben. Wolfgang left it, never again to make it his home.

It came about in this way. The heir-apparent

* C. Robinson.

of the Duchy of Weimar, accompanied by his brother and tutor, happened to pass through Frankfurt.

The fame of the young poet was already widespread. *Götz von Berlichingen* had carried his name triumphant through the country. *Götz* had been followed by *Werther*, and those who had responded to the martial manliness of the one were ready to sentimentalise and weep with the other. Whatever this new poet wrote had the power of genius to compel attention.

Karl August, the young duke, and his mother, the dowager duchess, had appreciative minds for genius. The prince arranged to meet the author and the meeting led eventually to a lifelong friendship, creditable alike to prince and poet.

This event was of such importance to Frau Aja, and the interview by which it was brought about is so graphically told in the autobiography—moreover, it gives such a direct glimpse into the Goethe household—that we may be excused for inserting it at some length.

One evening Doctor Wolf was sitting in his little study at the top of the house. He has himself left a sketch, or rather a smudge—for he was no artist—of this now celebrated room. A very simple, unassuming little room it must have been.

Referring to the well-known view of the Goethe

house, the three middle windows of the third story belong to the room in question.

Just under the window the writing-table had its place, on the left as one entered stood an easel. Besides these and a few necessary chairs, the room had little furniture.

In this little den, then, sat the poet busy and cheerful. How quickly, cheerfully, and gaily he now worked he calls many of his poems to witness.

But here comes a little piece of characteristic attitudinising. The sketch above referred to proves that he had no artistic talent, yet, he tells us, he drew and wrote alternately, and the little room was hung all round with his sketches, so that, with *shaded light*, it had the appearance of an artist's studio, and gave the impression of great industry on behalf of the inmate. Is not this a trace of that *Eitelkeit* which he at once pleaded guilty to and excused?

Into this characteristic apartment was unexpectedly ushered a gentleman, a well-made, upright figure of somewhat military appearance.

He announced himself as Major von Knebel.

After some preliminary conversation about the poets and literature of the day, it came out that he was one of the suite of the young prince. This led the talk to Weimar and the court, to the Duchess Amalia, how she had assembled there

the most renowned men to educate her sons, how she was not only a patroness of art but a dabbler in it herself.

The visitor was enthusiastic about Weimar. The theatre there was the finest in Germany, the place was famous alike for its actors and the authors who had been drawn thither.

Doctor Wolf, eagerly drinking in all that was said, involuntarily let the wish escape him that he might know this delightful, literary life more nearly.

"Nothing is easier," said his visitor. "The Crown Prince and Prince Constantine have just arrived in Frankfurt and wish to see and converse with you."

Goethe was only too pleased to arrange a meeting, and took his guest down to his astonished parents, who made this new friend welcome for their son's sake.

The result of the meeting with the princes was highly satisfactory on both sides. They were friendly and gracious, the poet brilliant and conversational. They parted desiring to see more of each other.

Wolfgang hastened home full of the good news.

But the sturdy, old *bürgerlicher* Rath by no means thought it good news. It requires no great effort to visualise the family scene.

Dr. Wolf

It is a February evening, somewhat chill, so that the crackling of the wood in the high German stove has a pleasant sound, the candles burn brightly in the polished silver candle-sticks, the blue room looks snug and homely with *bürgerlich* comfort.

The Herr Rath, in handsome dressing-gown and slippers, sits reading.

Opposite him, busy with some fine needlework, sits Frau Aja. She is comely to look on. Her clear, bright face shows to advantage against the blue tint of her China wall-paper. Her powdered hair is almost covered by a large lace cap surmounted in front by a sprightly knot of ribbon.

The rich lace hanging from her elbow-sleeves stirs softly to the movements of her shapely arms as her work proceeds.

The Herr Rath now and again reads out a passage and comments on it with dry pedantry, or chuckles when some line tickles his slow sense of humour. From time to time he allows his eyes to wander absently to the face of the clock.

Frau Aja's quick brown ones are constantly there, and sometimes she takes a swift glance towards the door if she hears a step in the street outside.

Both Herr and Frau are evidently expectant.

Everything is substantial, *bürgerlich*, and com-

fortable. A pleasant odour, foretaste of supper, comes from the back regions of the house. Yet the great house is dull and silent, and Frau Aja finds it so. Sometimes she hums a German air softly to herself and thinks of Cornelia.

By-and-by there is a footstep in the street, a rapid, eager step. A smile takes possession of Frau Aja's face, the listening expression passes from it, for every variety in the sound of that step has meaning for her. The Rath too has heard it: his ears are really pricked as alertly, though he would fain have his wife believe that he is engrossed with that ponderous volume.

The street door shuts with a sharp click, there is no pause in the hall. The room door is flung open, two strong arms are thrown round Frau Aja, and she is almost suffocated by a warm kiss.

Then the young son, dressed in the somewhat dandy costume he has thought rich enough for the eyes of royalty, with the double-caped overcoat flung back, stands in the ruddy light thrown upward from the stove, and tells the story of his reception by the prince, dwelling on its many trivial adventures with lingering enjoyment.

Frau Aja's face reflects every change of the handsome young one so like her own, while the Rath's heavy countenance and occasional grunts show that he too is interested, though not always pleased.

And now the room seems instinct with life. The youth has a long story to tell and tells it well with a gusto that makes no attempt to conceal a flattered vanity. The princes have made much of the poet; his genius descries a wider field opening before it.

During the narrative the Herr Rath's grunts become gruffer. In his burgher pride he has always held aloof from rank. Even when business necessitated dealings with the nobility, he would have no personal intercourse with those in high position.

He was accustomed to indulge his humour at the expense of the court and the fine doings that went on there. More than anything did he enjoy a witty passage of arms with his clever son on this subject. Their fencing-foils were proverbs. He would give the thrust.

"Procul a Jove, procul a fulmine."*

If it was pointed out that the goal of the thunderbolt, not its origin, was the point of danger, he would parry with the proverb:

"With great lords it is not good to eat cherries."

"Yet worse to eat with dainty people out of one basket," would be the retort.

This was capped by some other proverb, or this kind of doggerel:

* Far from Jove, far from his thunderbolt.

"Such as I am, I am still mine own.
To me shall favour ne'er be shown."

In reply to which the son would say:

"Blush not a favour to receive,
For you must take, if you would give."

Then again the Herr Rath:

"Though wheat at court seems flourishing,
Doubt that great harvest it will bring,
When to your barn you deem it brought
You'll find that after all 'tis naught."

Which found reply in:

"Who'er with princes is at home,
Will some day find good fortune come;
Who courts the rabble to his cost
Will find that all his years are lost."

But enough of the old Rath's wit, which appears to have been somewhat of the cart-horse type.

There was, however, one telling shot he would fire off at the last, for he knew it would strike home. He would triumphantly quote Voltaire's recent misadventure with the Great Frederick: how after having favoured him to the utmost and treated him with the freest familiarity the King suddenly turned a cold shoulder on the philosopher, had him arrested by town bands and thrown into the common jail. Such, declared the father, would be the fate of the son if he put his trust in princes.

This argument was not without weight. The poet had a full share of the pride of his burgher ancestors; he had no inclination for insult such as Voltaire had suffered. Nor was his father's character without influence on a mind that so readily recognised human worth.

Two years before he had written to a friend:

"The talents and powers I possess I need for my own aims. I am accustomed to act according to my intuitions, and thus could serve no prince."

He wished for, nay, must have greater freedom, a wider sphere of action. He believed he saw an opening for this if he accepted the prince's favour. At all hazards and in all ways he must cultivate his genius; it should be hampered by no social fetters. How he carried out his purpose is the story of his life, and we are concerned rather with that of his mother.

Frau Aja had but one desire, the welfare of her Hätschelhans.

In this dilemma she sought the advice of her dear and wise friend, Fräulein von Klettenberg. This friend had experience of court life, of its elevation and its pitfalls; moreover, she loved the young aspirant for fame only less than Frau Aja herself.

Therefore the Frau Rath betook herself the next day to the bedside of her counsellor.

The *schöne Seele* looked down on earthly

affairs from the advantage of her experience: she could see clearly, when the poor children of earth were groping blindly below; she could point out the right path through the worldly labyrinth because she was not herself distraught by human strivings and desires.

Whatever she should decree, Frau Aja's tact and energy would know how to accomplish.

Perhaps it will cause some surprise that this unworldly woman should recommend a court career for her favourite.

The explanation is that she combined the serpent's wisdom with the dove's gentleness. She knew that the young man must face life if he was to develop his latent power, that he must fight if he was to conquer. Her decision was for the court.

Induced by her far-seeing wisdom, the old Herr Rath at length gave consent.

Nevertheless the parents made one or two naive efforts to keep their young eagle in the nest. For Frau Goethe would willingly have had her only son remain with her, and Herr Goethe would greatly prefer that he should follow the straight path of the law than that he should be a prince's favourite, even if more courted than paying court.

The definite invitation to Weimar was still deferred: perhaps, after all, it might be evaded.

Wolfgang's erratic fancy was just at that time enthralled by a young lady, a daughter of a very rich banker of Frankfurt. The girl was a giddy coquette of sixteen, by no means a suitable wife for a man of genius, while her father the banker considered the bourgeois son of the Councillor Goethe by no means a match for his heiress.

The sturdy old Rath had little mind for a fine lady as daughter-in-law to fill the place of Cornelia, his too passive pupil.

Therefore the Rath and Räthin, carefully revolving matters in their anxious minds, conceived the idea, not at that period so amusing as it would be in these advanced days, of themselves selecting a wife for their son. Marriage, they thought, would steady him, and possibly induce him to settle in his native town, and forget those wild dreams of glory and public life.

Frau Aja felt the way by telling her son that since Cornelia's marriage the family was too small for the big house: he had lost a companion, she an assistant, the father a pupil.

The next step of this deep though transparent plot was taken when the father and mother were out walking. They chanced to meet a girl friend of their daughter Cornelia, who was well known to their son, and would make him a much more suitable wife than the "state lady," as the old Rath termed the banker's daughter.

So they made much of her, invited her into their pleasant garden by the Friedberger Gate, and had a long talk with her.

In the evening, at supper, they chaffed their son. The old Rath signified his gracious approval of the lady.

They even went so far as to rearrange the first story of the house, renovating articles that were shabby, as if they expected a new and welcome inmate.

One day Hätschelhans surprised his mother in the lumber-room, looking affectionately at the old inlaid family cradle. But he would not take the hint. Such things, he teasingly told her, were old-fashioned and out of date.

This scheme accordingly came to naught: but Frau Aja made one more attempt.

She invited to the large empty house her friend, the skilful physician Zimmermann, for whom she had a particular esteem and love, both for his own sake and also because of his kindness to her daughter Cornelia, who since her marriage had been in failing health and had received much professional service from her mother's old friend.

Zimmermann brought a young daughter with him, a good-looking, slender maiden with what should have been a pretty face had there been the least happy animation in it, but it was calm and impassive as that of a Greek statue. She

was subdued and silent, and seldom spoke, never in her father's presence.

This state of things did not last long. Under the soft radiance of Frau Aja's cheerfulness, the ice that bound the poor girl's spirit melted, and she became more natural.

One day her reserve broke into a passion of tears. She threw herself at the astonished Frau Goethe's feet, declaring she would sooner remain in that house as a servant, as a slavey, than return home with her father, of whose severity and tyranny they could have no idea. After living in the Goethe home with its loving mistress, her former life seemed as a hell.

Frau Aja's ready pity was deeply touched. She liked the girl and would gladly keep her. Why should not she be the wife they were looking for?

But when she referred this vital question to the person chiefly concerned, he was a trifle startled. To take a wife from sheer pity was a little sudden. He excused himself on the plea that to have such a father as a father-in-law would hardly be desirable.

Yet both son and mother loved and esteemed Zimmermann, whose tendency to hypochondria verged on madness.

Some years later Frau Aja wrote thus consolingly to him, not forgetting her little friend :

"You are not in good health: believe me, I am truly alarmed to hear it. Heavens! however did such an excellent, clever, kind, noble, loved man as yourself get such a dreadful complaint? Why just your useful self? I know a crowd of rogues who might be ill, who are no use in the world; one does not care whether they wake or sleep.

"Dear best friend! will you take the advice of a woman who certainly understands nothing whatever about medicine, but has known many people intimately who have been troubled with the same evil.

"Change of scene is always the best cure. You need only go thirty miles, if you only get out of your four walls. Don't stay at home. However hard it seems to an invalid, go into the open air, into the country among people you like, and kick all black thoughts to the devil. This is the means Dr. Luther tried and in his noble letter of consolation recommended to his dear friend Spaladinus.

"Follow then, best friend, the advice of a woman. It will be no shame to your great knowledge. Once on a time an ass gave a prophet good advice.

"That your dear young daughter still thinks of us and is well and happy is news after my heart. Allow me the pleasure of adding her to the number of my children. The dear sweet child will be in good company, for besides my real children I have many sons and daughters, the two Counts Christian and Friedrich von Stollberg, Lavater, Wieland, von Knebel, von Kalb, Demoiselle Fahlmer, Delph, von Wreden and others,

and as my dear daughter Zimmermann has for so long been unable to use the delightful name of mother, I hope she will agree to my proposal, so as not to forget the name entirely." *

Frau Aja had wisely persuaded Zimmermann to send the girl to school.

No one will be surprised that these somewhat crude efforts at match-making were futile.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe had, whether he himself was aware of it or not, chosen his career.

However, a long time of uncertainty and unrest intervened before the final summons to Weimar came. It was always repugnant to Goethe, and this was, in fact, one of his chief weaknesses, to oppose his will directly to that of those with whom he was closely connected, so that to please his father he kept up the pretence of studying law.

He made a compromise, an arrangement not altogether advantageous. The early morning hours were given to poetry, the advancing day to business.

Herr Goethe was an experienced jurist, thorough and capable, but slow of conception and execution. His position as imperial councillor prevented his

* The distinguished physician Zimmermann, author of the essay *On Solitude*, and other works, eventually went out of his mind. His melancholy was increased by the death of his daughter.

practising openly, but he prepared papers for advocates who were not similarly disqualified.

The father and son worked together thus: Whilst Wolfgang was indulging his poetic talent, the Rath would carefully read and digest the matter in hand, then when they met, he would lay it in order before his son. The poet worked it into presentable form with such ease and elegance that the old lawyer declared, if it were not for their relationship, he should envy his own son's talent. His own activity was renewed by the young man's energy.

The Rath, however, was shrewd enough to see that his son's poetic talent was of far more value than his son's business power, even though he would not acknowledge the fact except by managing that the poet should have plenty of leisure for its indulgence. Thus both were satisfied.

In September 1775 the Prince Karl August again passed through Frankfurt. This time he was accompanied by his young bride. Both were anxious to see the now famous author, and the royal civilities were renewed.

Dealings with princes, especially with those of small principalites such as then made a patchwork of the German empire, are never without humiliation to the person of bourgeois origin; humiliation sometimes intended, sometimes accidental, but in neither case considered of much

consequence by the inflicters. Dr. Wolf experienced a full share. In some cases he brought it on himself, as when having received an invitation to dine with the Duke of Meiningen, he misread it as coming from the Duke of Weimar, who happened to be staying at the same hotel—and had the mortification to find his supposed hosts preparing for a drive instead of for a state dinner, and to see them drive away, leaving him standing in the street.

The old Rath chuckled and shook his head over such occurrences. Frau Aja consoled her son as well as she could, but not herself understanding such treatment of her all-important Hätschelhans, confided to him that his father considered he was being made game of by his princely patrons.

However, the matter was explained. Dr. Wolf had only himself to thank for his heedlessness.

On leaving Frankfurt, the young Duke of Weimar took a most gracious farewell of the poet, giving him at last an unmistakable invitation to come to the court and take up his residence there. Indeed he carried his kindness as far as to arrange—so that there might be no possibility of the poet changing his mind—for one of the ducal suite to fetch him on an appointed day, when some business matter had been concluded in Strasburg, and convey him bodily to Weimar.

But "the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley!" Again a foolish misunderstanding nearly thwarted the duke's careful plan at the last moment.

The poet, in high spirits at seeing the path to glory now lying open and straight before him, had taken leave of his Frankfurt friends, packed his portmanteau and was waiting for the post-chaise which should take him to new regions and new conditions.

The appointed hour arrived, but not the carriage: the day passed, but no carriage appeared.

He could not ignore those fervid farewells, could not meet the friends who had started him on his travels so jovially. There was nothing for it but to hide, to remain indoors, to shut himself in his room.

The position was awkward, not, however, without a dramatic flavour for one who wrote plays. It stimulated his imagination. Isolated and solitary he set to work on *Egmont*.

The old Rath was delighted, so delighted when he heard the first scenes read, that he repressed the sneers about the princely invitation so ready on his tongue, in his son's presence, though they exploded directly he was with his wife, to whom he declared that the carriage and expected gentleman were phantoms, *ignes fatui* who could lead only to dismay and disappointment.

In spite of appearances, the younger Goethe stoutly trusted his princely friends. Some accident must have delayed the carriage. He was only too glad to get these hours of quiet seclusion to work at his drama, undisturbed by friends or enemies. The mental excitement rather aided than impaired his creative faculty, he says in his autobiography, thereby proving himself a very poet. That this drama, full of passionate impulse, could not have been produced so easily in a quite calm condition is credible.

It was not very long, however, before this imprisonment began to weary the young man. Accustomed to exercise and fresh air, and the intimate society of friends, he was longing for the excitement of court life. Wrapped in his cloak, he would steal out at night, linger about the house of the banker's daughter, his beloved Lili—so he named her—catch sight of her shadow on the blind or the sound of her voice, singing one of his own love-songs, and so appease his restlessness and anxiety with thoughts of love.

Days went by, no letter explained the delay, and it almost seemed as if the cynical old Rath was right. The drama no longer progressed. At length the father, still nothing loath to thwart the design of court life for his son, proposed that, having his portmanteau packed, Wolfgang should start on the long-projected journey to Italy. He

would readily supply cash and credit, if only his son would start immediately.

This was the turning-point in the poet's life, the "tide which, taken at the flood," led him to fortune.

Italy allured him as a promised land.

If the carriage did not arrive by a given time he would go to Heidelberg, from thence by way of the Tyrol to Italy.

The appointed day arrived but no carriage. Next morning he would start for Heidelberg.

The carriage must pass through Heidelberg, so there would be one more chance.

In Heidelberg he stayed with Demoiselle Delf, a friend of his mother's. After he had gone to bed a letter arrived—from Frankfurt. His conductor with the carriage had arrived—the delay had been caused quite accidentally—no slight had been intended. The gentleman begged his return at once, for he dared not go to Weimar and his duke without the poet. Dr. Wolf jumped out of bed, dressed, ordered post-horses, and, shouting the words from his own *Egmont* given at the head of this chapter, took the road to fame.

CHAPTER XII

CORNELIA

> There are problematic Natures which thrive in no condition in which they are placed, and which are satisfied with none. Thence arises the monstrous contradiction, that Life is consumed without enjoyment.
>
> GOETHE'S *Sprüche in Prosa.*

THE story of Cornelia Goethe demands a short chapter, to make a sketch of her mother's life complete.

The ultimate fate of Frau Aja's son and daughter, brought up in the same home, sharing most closely the same intellectual life, was in bitter contrast.

Whilst, as we have seen, the brother was becoming the cynosure of all eyes, the "observed of all observers," the darling of a court and of a nation, the sister was languishing in a distant town, solitary, depressed, and in fast failing health.

We have had a glimpse of Cornelia's girlhood, passed under the close surveillance of a too strict yet affectionate father; we have gained an idea

of her character, her morbid self-scrutiny and self-disgust, her warmth of love, her cynicism, her ambition and her disappointment.

We have seen how lonely she was in the large house, when she and her high-spirited companion reached the parting of the ways where boyhood and girlhood diverge.

We have seen her impatience under her father's too oppressive tyranny turned into almost hatred. There was in those days no escape for a woman from parental governance but through marriage.

Cornelia had an exaggerated sense of her own deficiencies in appearance and manner, so that when the stiff university man, the friend of her brother, Johann Georg Schlosser, asked her to be his wife, she accepted him more from a false sense of gratitude to one who showed her affection than from any emotion having the least warmth of love.

Schlosser, for his part, upright and worthy man though he was, had no quality whereby he could win an enthusiastic girl's love.

Cornelia's brother speaks of him in these suggestive words:

"I honour and love Schlosser, but he has something about him that I cannot get on with, so that I feel nervous with him."

He further describes his brother-in-law:

"He had a good figure, a round compressed countenance: the features, however, were not blunt. The form of his forehead, with his dark eyebrows and hair, gave an impression of earnest severity, of possible obstinacy. He was a man of good intention and of very perfect manners, but of a certain caustic dryness, which might have repelled had he not possessed so great a literary culture."

Schlosser had a great admiration for the English poet Pope, a fact in itself giving a hint of his somewhat limited nature.

He was undoubtedly—taken altogether—a very worthy person, and if husband and wife had been able to remain in touch with society, they might have been as happy as would be possible for such temperaments as theirs.

Schlosser, having worked through his academical years with credit and exertion, had then set up as advocate in Frankfurt-am-Main, had naturally become a frequenter of his friend Dr. Goethe's hospitable home, and had come to know and, as he believed, to love his friend's sister.

He wrote of Cornelia:

"I have found a girl who loves me and whom I love as my life: my love is so pure, so justified by virtue and reason."

A suggestive utterance in its perfect egoism.

This formal lover confided to his friend, Dr. Wolf, his intention of asking Cornelia to be his wife. His friendship, he said in his sedate manner, had passed into love, yet he must wait until he obtained an appointment before he could offer her a suitable home: his present position could not justify marriage.

The appointment he hoped for, which indeed had been almost promised him, was of some importance. It would have taken him to Karlsruhe, a residential town of the Duke of Würtemberg, whose court brought some social life to the place. Cornelia would have had at least an active life there. But Schlosser was passed over; the post he had a right to hope for was given to another, and he was relegated to the out-of-the-way town of Emmendingen in the Black Forest, with the post of upper bailiff.

The position, however, was a dignified one, and the formal advocate was fitted to fill it efficiently. To act entirely on his own authority, according to his own conviction, suited the self-reliant character which his friend, the volatile Bruder Wolf, so much admired. He was satisfied and fully employed.

It was a different matter for his wife. She longed for a wide sphere of influence; she thought she was going to an important town, where she would find an opening for her great

gifts, where she would be an acknowledged power, possibly a leader of opinion.

Instead, she found herself in an isolated village among boors and peasants. Her home was a large, bare house; her health, never strong, was exposed to an inclement climate.

Wolfgang, in the autobiography, draws one of his character-sketches of the sister he loved:

"Honestly, I must confess, that when I built castles in the air as to her fate, as I often did, I could never think of her as a housewife, but rather as an abbess, as a foundress of some noble community. She possessed all that such a high position demanded; she failed in all that was indispensable for a worldly career. Over female souls she everywhere exercised an irresistible sway, she attracted the minds of the young to her lovingly, and ruled them by right of her inward superiority. As she shared with me a universal tolerance for the good in humanity, with all its marvellous variation, as long as it had suffered no perversion, no peculiarity by which a striking personality was indicated need hide itself from her, or fear to offend her."

We learn from this that Cornelia's was a unique character, requiring a unique environment for full development, that she needed mental sustenance if she was to live.

How far her new home supplied this urgent need, or rather failed to supply it, her own words will tell:

"We are here entirely alone, there is no human creature within three of four miles. My husband's occupations allow him to pass but little time with me, and so I slink through the world with a body that is only fit for the grave. Winter is always unpleasant and burdensome to me; the beauties of nature afford us here our single pleasure, and when nature sleeps everything sleeps."

There were no bright vistas opened to her longing vision, such as had transfigured the comfortable, dull home in Frankfurt, visions revealed by her brother's constant demand for sympathy and advice in his magical conceptions of poetry and drama.

"My lively, impetuous, ever-excitable disposition," says Cornelia's brother, speaking of her husband, "was in entire contrast to his own."

The pessimism natural to such a mind as Cornelia's settled on her, in a dark, hopeless cloud. Her inward discontent with her environment and with herself increased. As she had done at home, so here in her new life she tried in the same spiritless fashion to do her duty, to make her husband's small income cover the expenses consequent on her own ill-health and an increasing family.

Her husband writes of her:

"She feels every wind, every drop of rain, even indoors; she is afraid of the cellar and kitchen."

At first, visits from her girl friends somewhat relieved her loneliness, but her ill-health put a stop to this relief.

Wolfgang at first missed his sister-confidante almost as much as she missed his confidences. He speaks of her departure from the home thus to a friend:

"I lose much in Cornelia; she understands and puts up with my whims. I look forward to a wretched solitude; you know what I had in my sister, still what can be done? A brave fellow must get used to anything. In our little circle things look somewhat glum, my sister makes a great gap. My sister is brave; she knows what life is! A man only learns by unlucky chances what is in him."

Brave she might be, but the "unlucky chance" proved too much for her. After the birth of her eldest girl, she was so ill that she had to keep her bed for two years, until Zimmermann, her mother's friend, the good physician, visited her and obtained some amelioration of her condition by his skill.

Frau Aja wrote thus to thank him for his care of her poor daughter:

"God be praised that Frau Schlosser is better. But who was her benefactor? Whom shall I thank? Next to God, no one but our dear Zimmermann."

Unfortunately the improvement did not last.

Another letter of Frau Aja to Lavater on June 23, 1777, is of sadder import.

"He gives the weary power and sufficient strength to those who lack—what He promises, He will certainly perform. We are a new, living, visible witness of this when we know Cornelia, our only daughter, is in the grave . . . and indeed it was quite unexpected. The lightning and the thunder-clap were one.

"Without the firm rock of faith in God—in the God who numbers the hairs of the head, without whom no sparrow falls to the ground—who neither slumbers nor sleeps—it would be impossible to keep up; but we who know that immortality is beyond the grave, and that this span-long life has soon an end, it becomes us to kiss the hand that strikes the blow and to say (even with a thousand tears), 'The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away; blessed be His name.'"

Wolfgang wrote affectionately to his mother. "Care for my father's health; we are now so much to each other," he begged her, a request which must come home to all who have suffered family bereavement because of its simple humanity.

Frau Aja replies:

"Dear Son!—Your letter has done me much good; you are angry with yourself, because you cannot console, but I tell you it was refreshment to me."

How greatly the brother felt his sister's death is proved by the touching brevity of the entries in his diary at the time :

"June 16th, 1777. Letter about the death of my sister.

"Dark, broken day."

On the two following days merely :

"Pain and dreams."

Cornelia Schlosser died in June. In September of the following year Schlosser married again. Goethe writes of this event, to his mother, thus :

"I can say nothing to the strange news of your letter—it seems like planting a tree in the autumn. With my sister, such a strong root that held me to earth was torn up ; the branches above, which were nourished by it, must die."

Frau Aja's brother, Dr. Textor, wished her to ask her son for a poem on the occasion of Schlosser's second marriage—surely a thoughtless request. Frau Aja has not the courage to write direct to her son ; her letter is to his secretary. She ends it thus :

"I do not think your master will have either the time or the mind for this."

Which was probably the case, for Goethe wrote to the new wife :

"That thou canst be my sister makes my

unforgettable loss fresh ; pardon then my tears at your happiness."

Cornelia Schlosser left behind to Frau Aja's care two little orphan girls, one three years old, one a new-born infant.

The brother's name is written in the heart of a nation. Memorials and statues of him abound throughout Germany. The sister's grave is forgotten, the place of it even is unknown.

CHAPTER XIII

THE HERR RATH

For this reason letters are of such value, because they directly preserve the personality.

GOETHE.

HERE we must pause. Thus far our portrait has been chiefly the work of the son, now Frau Aja herself takes up the pencil, or rather, the pen, with which she wrote those hearty cheerful letters of hers.

Her home now had lost the bright, volatile presence, which had been the chief anxiety, interest and joy of her life for so many years, her Hätschelhans no longer came bursting in to claim her ready sympathy for his skating feats, or her interest in a plot for a projected drama.

She had to be contented with such news of his doings as she could get from letters, or friends who had seen him.

She heard from Zimmermann, who held the post of court physician at Weimar, that Wieland had received the young courtier most warmly,

forgetful of the satire* Goethe had hurled at him.

"The testimony of Wieland's love for my son, which you have had the friendship to send me, rejoices me heartily; that is just Dr. Wolf's lucky fate, that all people he comes near love him, which is indeed quite natural; he has a good heart, loves his fellow-men, tries to give joy wherever he goes; people only see in him the friend of men and forget the writer of satire."

At the end of May 1776, she writes to Klinger, one of her son's Frankfurt friends, also a poet:

"The Doctor is happy and well in his Weimar, has taken possession of a splendid garden, belonging to the Duke, just outside the town; Lenz has sent me a poetical description of it. The poet [meaning her son] sits there as if he were nailed to it. Weimar must be a dangerous place to get away from, for all stay there."

Here we see a trace of the longing she must have felt sometimes for a glimpse of her "poet," although her motherly good sense recognised the necessity for his leaving home, since his father's domination had become irksome. She knew that he must make a career and a name for himself, commensurate with his capabilities.

A letter written by Goethe to a friend some

* Goethe had satirised Wieland in a thoughtless farce, for his modern treatment of ancient gods and heroes. The farce bore the name *Götter, Helden und Wieland.*

years before this, lets us see painfully that the relations between father and son were not always free from bitterness. He thus alludes to his father :

"Dear God, when I am old shall I be like him? Will my soul no longer cling to what is lovely and good? Strange that one should believe that the older a man is, the freer he shall be from the earthly and small. But he is ever more earthly and smaller."

From these bitter words it almost seems as if the illness that ultimately caused Herr Goethe's death was already casting the first shadow across his mind.

For experience, alas! reveals to us that youth idealises age, that age and wisdom are not always coincident, that failing bodily power does not confer spiritual improvement.

Do we wonder then that the son obeyed the summons to Weimar, and left the gloomy home, cheered only by Frau Aja's indomitable brightness, for the intoxicating pleasures of court life?

If when he first arrived in Weimar the young Goethe—and no one can deny that this was the case—was caught and carried off his feet by the swift stream of court frivolity, it is equally impossible to deny that in the end he guided its course. It was unavoidable that he, with his receptive, facile temperament, should feel the

force; it was impossible that, with his powerful mind, he should yield to it.

On the other hand, we can understand and sympathise with the elder Goethe. It is not surprising that his staunch burgher nature should be pained and disappointed at this turn in his son's career. Proud of his son he was, but not fully appreciative of the youth's unique genius.

Frau Aja, knowing her son's nature more intimately by its kinship with her own, knew that at last he must swim the stream powerfully, even if at first he sank below it.

It is the portrait of the mother on which we are engaged; it is no part of our duty to follow the son through his wild youth. Books more than enough have been written on Goethe, books of kindly spirit, and books far otherwise.

Frau Aja has told us that she found delight in having great men with and around her. She must have enjoyed entertaining Klopstock, whose writing she so much admired. Wieland addressed her as "Mother," and would ask for a criticism of his productions in her own style. Merck also was among her friends.

But the hospitality Herr and Frau Goethe showed to the friends of their son naturally brought expense. One can have too much even of a good thing. Many of his associates were men of high worth; others were not so desirable;

they were too ready to borrow, he too ready to lend.

Götz von Berlichingen had brought fame, nothing more substantial, to its author; pirated editions had swallowed up the gain that should have been his. Court life was expensive. Frau Aja must have been relieved when she had to relate that her "Doctor" had received an appointment.

"You already have long known," she writes in July 1776 to Salzmann, another of Goethe's Frankfurt friends, "that our son had been appointed Privy Councillor by the Duke. Yesterday we heard many fine and good things about him. I am sure you rejoice in our joy. You, such an old friend and acquaintance of the Doctor, take an interest in his good fortune, and can as a human friend feel, as the Psalmist says, 'Blessed is he who rejoices in his children,' how much good it has done his parents. God guide him further, and may he do much good in the land of Weimar. I know you will say *Amen* with us."

The appointment was a thing to make a mother's heart proud, for the young man of twenty-six had been chosen by his prince before far older and, in some senses of the word, wiser men. The prince himself thus justifies his act:

"Enlightened persons congratulate me on

possessing such a man ; his genius and capacity are well known. As to the observation that persons of merit may think themselves unjustly passed over: I observe, in the first place, that nobody, to my knowledge, in my service, has a right to reckon on an equal degree of favour ; and I add that I will never consent to be governed by mere length of service or rotation in my choice of a person whose functions place him in such immediate relation to myself."

The salary of this high preferment was but £200 a year, yet even this sum was welcome. The following letter addressed to the lively aunt, the heroine of the adventure at Karl VII.'s coronation recounted above, will prove how much the brilliant Privy Councillor was in need of ready cash :

"*Jan.* 5, 1776.

" Dear Aunt!—I ought to write to my mother, but I write to you that you may enjoy and digest my letter together.

" I need money—for no one can live on air—so I must ask you, little aunt, to think it over with mother, whether my father will have enough sense and feeling for the reflected grandeur of his son, to give me 200 fl. or part of that sum.

" If he won't, my mother must write to Merck, who will send it me. "

Frau Aja could not get the money from her

husband. Merck had to be appealed to and generously responded.

Wolfgang writes again, March 6:

"Now, I beg once for all, be satisfied. My father may boil over as he likes; I can't always answer it; not always pacify his whims. It comes to this: I remain here, and have hired a fine lodging, but my father owes me an establishment and an allowance; my mother must arrange as she can."

He adds more tenderly:

"My mother must only do her best and see what she can do with my father without worrying herself."

This time the Räthin had to supply money of her own: the Rath was still obdurate.

We are glad to find that Wolfgang was not without proper compunction at drawing on his mother's private little hoard.

"I have drawn madly on your cash-box," he writes, and tells her that if she is in difficulties, and can get nothing from his father, he will send her money himself. It was not parsimony that drew the Rath's purse-strings so tight; his health was beginning to fail, his daughter was not too well off, and at that time in bad health; and he had his wife, for whom he had a deep affection, to think about. When his son's Italian tour was

under discussion, he had been generously ready with both cash and credit, but he did not and could not approve of his son's attachment to a court. The dearest wish of his heart had been frustrated. The life of a court he thought useless and extravagant. Could he be expected to oil the machinery himself, which he considered was to carry a promising career down hill?

When the son had first confirmed his genius by *Götz von Berlichingen*, Herr Goethe had refused the funds necessary for publication. Gradually but surely the slower intellect of the father had recognised the talent that would have its way. When *Egmont* was ready for publication, his impatience to see it in print could hardly be held in check.

We must acquit the Herr Rath of meanness; of an inordinate and unreasonable desire of domination we cannot acquit him. He would still be schoolmaster; his gifted son must still be obedient pupil.

The Herr Rath's illness increased after the blow of his daughter's death. Frau Goethe writes thus touchingly to her friend Lavater of that event:

"O dear Lavater! the poor mother has much, much to bear; my husband was ill all the winter, even the slamming of a door alarmed him, and I had to bring the message of his daughter's death,

whom he loved above all things—my heart was as if crushed."

Her husband was suffering, her son away, her daughter buried in a lonely and distant grave, even Frau Aja's bright spirit was dimmed.

She writes to Goethe's secretary, Philip Seidel:

"The Herr Rath is always not quite well; we need medicine, take walks and so on. The years indeed are approaching of which it may be said they do not please me. But as for me, myself, I am, thank God, brisk and well, and always in good humour when I hear good tales from you, so give me often that pleasure."

More and more did her thoughts and her love turn to Weimar; if she did not hear from Wolfgang himself, she got others to write of her "Doctor," as she so proudly calls him.

"Your letter of the 5th Oct.," she says to Seidel, "has given us great pleasure, particularly since the Doctor is well and in good spirits. If you write such things," she continues slyly, "all your present and future vagabondism shall be forgiven you, especially since Herr Merck tells much good of you and how nicely you have done and cared for all the business of your master; as a brave fellow you deserve pleasure also and I wish you much. The travels of your master may be where they will; if you will only let us know

in confidence where he is, for one cannot know when one may get a letter."

Her son had bidden her "to continue to procure as much variety for herself as the social life around her offered."

"May I continue," he writes, "to hear from you that your cheerfulness does not forsake you in my father's present condition."

She took this good advice, keeping up her spirits as best she could whilst tending her husband with the greatest tenderness. She played chess with her sister, the lively Johanna, having a hearty laugh over the great stupid king, who allowed any puppy to give him check. She went to her weekly concerts or occasionally to the play.

In the winter of 1777 Wieland, the man who had so generously forgotten and forgiven her son for that thoughtless joke at his expense, visited her.

"From morning till night all is topsy-turvy," she writes to a friend, the wife of the manager of the Frankfurt Theatre. "Since you have a poet for husband, you know that that species of creature makes more disorder in a day than we other poor earth-worms in a year; so you can easily imagine the confusion and disorder of my household."

She says in another place of this disturber of domestic peace, a poet:

"This winter we have learnt to know friend Wieland. Who sees him and does not love him? I will not say what he deserves. He was with us, with Merck, eight days. Oh, what a splendid time it was! You can have no idea of it, for with you there are always good people, but with us!!!!!!! I am always afraid of rusting; when one has only bad people about one, it is a 1000 to 1 but what one gets bad oneself.

"Brother Wolf [her son] is, thank God, well, and very pleased with his garden-house [given Goethe by the duke]. He prepared a drama, * a fine piece of work, for the reigning duchess's birthday."

Of this duchess we must now hear more.

* *Der Triumph der Empfindsamkeit.*

CHAPTER XIV

THE DUCHESS AMALIA

> In this workaday world, one cannot have everything at one time, each must be contented with his lot—for no one can make anything a whit the better with murmuring and grumbling. Fate will go on turning her machine, whether we laugh or whine—so let's make the best of our little scrap of life, and not make our days miserable unless we are in very great trouble.
>
> *A brew from Frau Aja's kitchen.*

IN June of the next year, 1778, the Dowager Duchess Anna Amalia of Saxe-Weimar visited Frankfurt—visited also the Goethe-geburthaus, attracted by a desire to become acquainted with the mother of her son's new Minister, the wild, fascinating Geheim Rath Goethe.

Though the station in life of the two women was so different—the duchess being a niece of the great Frederick, and for a long time, during her son's majority, an actual ruler—they had much in common.

Their characters bore some similarity; both had a cheerful zest for life, both had hearty

genuine natures, and, above all, both had sons in whom their hope and love was centred.

During the Seven Years War, the duchess had governed her son's small princedom wisely and well.

Towards her eldest son, who had just reached the age of manhood, she had exercised a discreet severity, had sought to check his lawless, headstrong youth. Now that he was old enough to assume the reins himself, her influence would, she knew, have to yield to that of his Ministers. Therefore she showed her judgment when she received with favour the young councillor, who, having in his disposition much in accord with her son's, at the same time possessed an intellect too strong to sink into that slough of self-indulgence which borders so closely the path of royal development.

Her experience of men, shrewd and far-seeing, led her to the conclusion that, if the poet-councillor appeared also wild and dashing—below the surface his nature was wise and faithful.

That she should wish to make the acquaintance of the father and mother of her son's new adviser proves her good sense.

So it came about that one day Frau Aja, duly advised, had to receive, in her yellow room—the room to the right of the street door as one enters—a small insignificant lady, with a large

dignified head poised upon a short neck, and out of whose face, with its strong masculine features, looked two large, scrutinising, blue eyes.

This little aristocratic lady would doubtless enter the *burgerliches* house with becoming dignity; the dignity would gradually soften to a friendly heartiness when it came in contact with Frau Aja's genial deference.

A strange little figure followed the little duchess, a figure with a humpback, a wizen, elfin creature that challenged straight-backed humanity with defiant roguery. This was Louise Göchhausen, the merry maid of honour, the duchess's dwarf favourite, and the butt of the court gallants, who nicknamed her *Thusnelda*—"witty herself, the cause of wit in others."

The friendship begun in that yellow room between two mothers, the princely Duchess Anna and the *bürgerliche* Frau Aja, increased and deepened with years.

We have no record of what passed at that first meeting; we imagine it was merry yet in a measure earnest. The first letter from Frau Aja to her new friend is dated August 17, 1778.

"Dearest Princess!—A thousand and still another thousand thanks, for the grace and love you have shown us. My delight that I am to

THE DOWAGER DUCHESS ANNA AMALIA

possess a Höllen Bregel * of my own, it would be impossible for your highness to imagine. I shall be able to laugh all to myself, without making Herr Krausze cross [Kraus was an artist in Weimar], only it is a pity the Fräulein Thusnelda is not here, we should have such a chuckle as we had over the Pug by Herr Etling.

"I was moved to tears by my gracious princess thinking on her travels of Frau Aja, and trying to give her pleasure.

"As soon as the Höllen Bregel arrives, it shall be placed in the little room opposite my living-room, till now called 'the yellow room': in future to be named the 'Weimar room'; and all that I now possess from Weimar, and all that I shall possess, shall be kept there, as sacred relics, and if I am weary of my solitude and the tiresome people about me, so that I feel as if I could not breathe, I will go into this dear room and remember that the best of all princesses walked up and down here, and then look at all my treasures one after the other. Quickly my fancy will transport me to Weimar, and all oppression—bad temper—*ennui*—and whatever those bad spirits are called—will be turned out neck and crop. The father was delighted that your Highness remembered him so graciously, and considers it one of the happiest moments of his life that he has had the pleasure to make the

* The duchess was about to present Frau Aja with a picture by the Dutch artist called Hell-Breughel on account of the fantastic scenes he painted. He lived towards the end of the sixteenth century. Frau Aja's spelling is, as often, incorrect.

acquaintance of such an excellent princess: he will never forget it and commends himself humbly to your future favour."

Can this message be literally the democratic old Rath's? Has not Frau Aja sugared it with her own sweet temper? Probably the irritable old gentleman had to some extent overcome his ancient prejudice against princely patronage, possibly a secret satisfaction that his son's friendship conferred as much honour as the duke's mollified his dislike to rank; moreover, we must take into consideration the fact that the duchess was the niece of Frederick II., the hero of the Herr Rath's youth.

On September 8, the Hell-Breughel arrived, accompanied by "a whole mountain of gloves," which made Frau Aja, so she tells the duchess, "so singing, springing and cheerful that she was on the spot twenty years younger."

The princess earnestly wished her new friend to visit Weimar, knowing what a pleasure it would be to Mütter Aja to witness her son's popularity and happiness.

The following pressing invitation will serve to show the kind terms the two mothers were on.

"The Duchess Amalia to Frau Aja.—Dear Mother!—Don't fancy the matter so difficult; friend Wolf also wishes it. We will, during the time, have all kinds of amusements for the old

father. Kranz * shall go to him and shall play the violin to him in his masterly manner. I think, dear mother, that your heart will itself speak for the Hätschelhans to wish to see him again ; you cannot think how pleased I shall be."

But it was no easy matter now to leave the poor Herr Rath, who depended on his wife for everything.

"The journeying to dear, dear Weimar," writes Frau Aja, "may very well come off in the spring —Merck insists persistently and firmly on it, and your Highness can easily imagine that it would be the highest of earthly joys to Frau Aja. The father, who humbly wishes to be graciously remembered by your Highness, took your gracious offer of sending Krantz to him, during my absence, quite seriously, and was delighted to think he should be so well entertained. Your Highness can see from this that the matter can be arranged, and is not so impossible as it appears."

Poor Frau Aja looks forward so much to this projected holiday that she dreams of it. Sometimes it seems impossible to leave the old father alone; at one moment he thinks it can be managed and at the next, the very idea of his wife leaving him makes him ill. "We must wait till the spring comes," she settles, "and then see what can be done."

"Meanwhile, until the hour strikes, I tell myself

* Ducal musician at Weimar.

the finest fairy-tales about it, and am happy in the hope."

News from Weimar is her one delight, she declares.

"In order to make my little ship float, the wind from Weimar must fill the sails—I do not care a hair what happens to the rest of the world; even the postman knows it, for when he brings a letter from there, he almost pulls the bell off, with other letters it is only a mere ping-pong, therefore I gave him a double New Year's box, because he has so well understood the thought of Frau Aja's heart."

If sometimes Frau Aja goes a trifle far in her adulation of her duchess, we have to take into consideration several things. First, that it is the custom among foreigners to use much stronger terms than the reserved Briton deems necessary for the commencement and termination of a quite ordinary letter. Secondly, that Frau Aja was an enthusiastic soul, expressing herself enthusiastically. Lastly and chiefly, that her Hätschelhans' fate was to some extent in this imperious little lady's hands.

Such letters as the following witness to a mother's anxiety:

"Weimar has indeed the greatest influence over our joy and sorrow. Will your Highness be so kind as to arrange that my son shall have a

dwelling in the town during the winter? Whenever we have had bad weather here (as we have just now, since rain falls without ceasing), it weighs heavily on my heart to think how it must go with Dr. Wolf in his garden, that all kinds of evils may come through it. Your Highness will win Frau Aja's endless gratitude if you will take this load off her heart."

The Räthin, after her careless manner, writes as if her son actually slept in his garden; indeed, this was not far from the case, the celebrated garden-house was little more than a glorified summer-house, yet so fond was its poet-owner of fresh air and solitude, so averse from close rooms, that when he found it desirable to rebuild his garden-hut, he preferred to sleep out on an exposed terrace, and that in early spring, rather than retire to the stove-heated hotels of Weimar. Frau Aja's fears did not arise, therefore, entirely from mother's "coddling."

The duchess, being an understanding mother, kindly sets the Räthin's mind at rest.

"Weimar, 23 *Oct.*, 1781.

"Dearest Frau Aja!—I am very pleased to be able to tell you that your darling Hätschelhans has graciously resolved to hire a house in the town. Certainly he will not move in before Easter, because the lease of the present tenant is not out until then; meanwhile, dear mother,

we have gained half the battle, and it is well to have got so much. I have also promised to get some furniture because he is so very sweet and good. So please be good enough, dear mother, to send me some patterns of chintz for chairs and sofas with the prices.

"Herr Gevatter [Gossip] Wieland is very proud of your remembering him so lovingly; he cried with much earnestness, 'That is a woman for me! She is the ornament of her sex!' and I said *Amen*."

Sometimes Frau Aja sends to the duchess "a brew from her kitchen."

"Your Highness has done me the honour to ask how I am getting on. Thanks be to God! ever in the good old manner and way, that is to say, being interpreted, I am well, contented, in good spirits and the rest of it. Indeed, in my situation, there is no great art in it. But in spite of that it comes more from inward contentment with God and myself and my fellow-men than from outward conditions. I know so many people who are not happy, who make their poor scrap of life as sour as vinegar, and fate is not in the least to blame for all this ill-humour and unsatisfactory condition. The whole fault is discontent. Your Highness will pardon me this moral brew—it's not usually my fashion, but for some time I have been the confidante of several kinds of folk, who all consider themselves unhappy—and not a word of it is true, and I feel sorry for the ills and tortures of the poor souls."

The duchess's letters witness to an equal love and appreciation.

"Ah, mother, mother!" she writes; "you easily guess my thoughts! What is the old father doing? I am afraid he is not well. Greet him from me a thousand times. Farewell, dearest mother, keep me in loving remembrance and think often of your friend

"AMALIA."

And again:

"Dear Frau Aja!—My joy at the letter is not easy to tell, nor will I try to do so, for true feelings are too sacred to be set down with pen and ink. You know, dear mother, how dear you are to me, and can believe how intensely your remembrance of me pleases me."

Merck, the friend of both, says: "When the duchess gets a letter from Frau Aja, she talks as if a piece of good fortune had happened to her."

For one in high position to have a true, loving friend is not easy. Frau Aja was such a friend to Amalia, cheery and wise. If the duchess was in low spirits she would, she says with an admirable simplicity that does her credit,

"do as Frau Aja, shake myself once or twice, sit down to the clavier or draw, then my ideas are again *couleur de rose*."

With Thusnelda, the weird little humpback maid of honour, Frau Aja was on terms of comical

friendship. In writing to this correspondent the poet's mother alway tries her hand at verse.

This is a specimen :

Beginning of January 1779.

An Louise von Göchhausen !—

Dein guter Wunsch auf grün papier
Hat mich gemacht sehr viel pläsir,
Im Verse, machen habe nicht viel gethan
Das sieht mann diesen Warlich an
Doch hab ich gebohren ein Knäbelein schön
Das thut das alles gar trefflich verstehn
Schreibt Puppenspiele kutterbunt
Tausend Allexandriner in einer Stund
Doch da derselbe zu dieser frist
Geheimdter Legations Rath in Weimar ist
So kan er bei bewandten sachen
Keine Verse vor Frau Aja machen
Sonst solldest du wohl was bessers kriegen
Jetzt muszt du dich hieran begnügen
Es mag also dabey verbleiben
Ich will meinen Danck in prosa schreiben.*

* Your wishes kind on paper green
Have given me great joy I ween ;
Write good verses I never can ;
This is plain to every man,
Though I have a handsome son,
Who writes verse with any one,
Plays for puppets by the score,
Alexandrines by the hour.
But just now, he cannot, since
He's made Geheimrath by his prince,
Had he helped Frau Aja's letter,
She'd have sent you something better.
This will have to do, this time,
Though it isn't perfect rhyme ;
But I tell you, at the close,
Next one I will write in prose.

Frau Aja says versifying is not her forte, nor can we contradict her, yet she is right proud of her *Lust zu fabuliren*, talent for improvisation.

"Write books? No, that I cannot do, but relate what others have written—I should like to find my master!!!"

Frau Goethe had been anxious for her son's comfort in his garden-house during the winter; she entered into his enjoyment of it in summer with her usual zest.

"What happy days I have passed with you in your garden-house this summer—and the stories I have had to tell about it—for, between you and me, that is my brilliant side."

These days spent in her son's garden were only imaginary. The visit to Weimar never took place; poor Herr Goethe could not spare her.

But she had a glimpse of her son, who paid her a visit with his duke. He prepared her for it thus:

"*Aug.* 9, 1779.

"My desire to see you once more has up to this time been held in check by the circumstances which made my presence here more or less necessary. But now an opportunity may present itself, in regard to which, however, I must before all things ask the strictest secrecy. The duke has a fancy to enjoy the beautiful autumn on the Rhine. He wishes that I should go with him

and Kammerherr Wedel, and that we should alight at your house, but, in order to avoid the friends at the fair, remain only a few days and then continue on by water. Afterwards he proposes that we should return and take up our abode with you, so as from thence to visit the neighbourhood. Whether you look on this prosaically or poetically, it is really the dot on the i of your whole past life, and for the first time I return to my home well and happy and with all possible honour. But as I should like, since the wine has turned out so well on the mountains of Samaria, that there should be piping also, I will hope for nothing less than that you and my father should have open and feeling hearts to receive me, and to thank God, who in such a manner lets you see your son again in his thirtieth year."

Truly the letter of a spoilt son. The reader will remember Frau Aja's key between the Bible leaves when her son was ill, the prophetic text about the vineyards of Samaria, which was now, he reminds her, being fulfilled.* The text had a special import for these inhabitants of the land of vineyards, and it had become a household word in the Goethe home.

The poor Herr Rath was hardly in a state to enjoy the prosperity of the son for whom he had planned so much. Goethe writes :

"God has not willed that my father should

* See p. 141.

enjoy the fruits so keenly hoped for, which are now ripening. He has taken his appetite from him and so be it. I willingly ask nothing on his part, but whatever behaviour the humour of the moment may instigate. But you I would see right joyful and hope you will have such a day as you have never had yet."

He is evidently a trifle anxious about entertaining his prince in his *bürgerlich* home: he writes minute instructions to his mother as to the duke's board and lodging.

"We shall arrive about mid-September, and stay with you a few days very quietly. For since the duke is not anxious to meet his aunts and cousins, who will be at the fair, we shall go right on and float down the Main and Rhine. When we have finished our tour, we shall come and take up our quarters with you *in State*. . . .

"Our quarters you can arrange in this way. Make up the duke's bed in the little room; have the organ, if it still stands there, moved out. The large room can be for receiving visitors as an ante-room to his apartment. He sleeps on a clean sack of straw, over which is spread a fine linen sheet, and a light coverlet. Get ready the chimney room for his servants by having a mattress bed placed there. For Herr von Wedel, the back, grey room may be prepared, with a mattress bed, &c.

"For me, I will be in my own old room above, with a sack of straw, like the duke's.

"With regard to the eating, have dinner for four,

no more nor less ; no cooking beyond your own *chefs-d'œuvre* served in your best style ; you had better get whatever fruit you can for mornings.

"Take all the lustres out of the duke's room. They would look ridiculous to him. You might leave the wall candlesticks. Let all be as neat as it always is, the less ceremony the better. Seem as if we had lived with you ten years. For servants provide one or two beds up under the roof where our people sleep.

"Put out for the duke your silver-plated washing-basin, candlesticks, &c. He takes no coffee of any sort. Wedel will please you much ; he is the best you have yet seen of us men."

This letter is interesting, because it illustrates the simple habits of a German prince of the period, which contrast advantageously with the luxury of the French nobility. It also gives us a pleasing peep at our Frau's efficient housekeeping.

Are the lustres so ruthlessly condemned by the Geheimrath, the same which she mentions in this letter to the Duchess Amalia?

"Just as I was about to send this letter to the post, Herr Rath Tabor sent me word of the arrival of the new-fashioned lustres. I went the same evening with Aunt Fahlmer [her sister] and drove there at eight o'clock to see the wonders. We found a tolerably large room, where at the table there was space for twenty covers or more. The room was so light that one could easily read in the most distant corner. The new machine hung

as was natural in the middle, but the finest thing of it is, that I never saw a finer effect of light, for round the whole machine was a white gauze and this gave to the whole quite a fairylike appearance, so that we thought for the first few minutes that we were in an enchanted hall. The best sweet oil is burnt in the lamps, but the wicks are something quite special. . . . Your Highness, when you were here, said that if I liked the lustres I was to buy some for you, and they please me very much, and the price, considering their advantages, is not dear. Indeed there is nothing costly about the thing, they are of tin, but as they are used for lighting and the white gauze covers all up, it seems to me it does not much matter what they are made of. Your Highness therefore will receive an enchanted lantern very soon. The Prince von Braunschweig has bought a similar one."

With regard to the eating, as her son says, no doubt Frau Aja understood that to perfection; no doubt her celebrated round table would furnish all that a prince of such simple tastes as the Duke of Weimar could desire; no doubt the collared head, so much approved by Wieland, would figure there. This collared head was so famous that the Frankfurt butcher refused to teach others who were sent to learn the mystery of its preparation, lest Frankfurt should lose the distinction of alone preparing collared head. Then there would be her turkey pasties. To

wash these dainties down, there would be the sparkling *Tyrannenblut* (tyrant's blood) which earned Frau Aja her name.

On September 24 the Räthin writes an account of the ducal arrival to the duchess :

"His Highness, our gracious and best prince, alighted (that he might take us entirely by surprise) some distance from the house and came noiselessly to the door, rang the bell, came into the blue room and so forth. Now your Highness can imagine Frau Aja seated at the round table, when the door opened, how in a moment Häschelhans' arms were round her neck, how the duke waited at a little distance a witness of her motherly delight, how at last Frau Aja ran as if intoxicated to the dear prince, half crying, half laughing, hardly knowing what to do, how the handsome chamberlain von Wedel took a share in that astonishing joy—then the entrance of the father—it is beyond description. . . . Merck came also, and behaved tolerably well, though he can never quite leave Mephistoviles (*sic*) behind, one is quite accustomed to that. Quite contrary to custom, there were no princes nor princesses at the fair, which was just what our dear duke wished, so that they were not worried."

Goethe took his duke to Emmendingen to see his brother-in-law's family, and when there the brother visited his poor sister's grave, with what feelings we may imagine.

The mother tells us in a letter—in which she

mentions the "Saturday girls," whose acquaintance we shall make later:

"Häschelhansz I found very much changed for the better; he looks in better health, and is in every way more manly; his moral character, to the great joy of his old acquaintance, has not suffered in the least; they all found him the same old friend; it rejoiced my very soul how dear they all found him again, the jubilee among the Saturday girls,* among our relations and acquaintances, the joy of my old mother and so forth. How all the world wanted to see Goethe's duke, so that my sitting-room was always full of people, all waiting eagerly until the prince came downstairs, how he entered, full of kindness, into the room, let them all look at him, talked with one and another, how all present were merry and joyful."

So the old *bürgerliches* house was once again the scene of bustle and aristocratic doings. How the poor old Rath bore it all, we do not know; alas! he was fast failing.

On November 5 Frau Goethe sends, "at the order and command of a certain Privy Councillor of the name of Goethe," a fine and uncommonly pleasing description of the tour, to the duchess.

"Frau Aja," she says, "in spirit saw all the splendid country, climbed all the rocks, and rejoiced with her whole soul over the happiness

* See chapter xvi, "Saturday Girls."

and well-being of the travellers. Although," she adds, "I was heartily glad that they should have so much pleasure, I cannot deny that we longed for their return, amongst many other reasons, which might be told like *paternosters*, the fruit which I had stored in rooms and cupboards was not the least. For since I knew that our gracious duke is very fond of grapes, and that when they were here before, they liked them much, I stored not only the finest and best from the garden but also those of my cousins and gossips, who each wished to contribute their small mite for the entertainment of their prince."

But alas! the duke's return was so long delayed that most of the grapes had to be eaten, and Frau Aja had to content herself with the reflection that they must have had so much splendid fruit during their tour through the land of vineyards that her own little hoard might have lost its flavour.

When her guests have gone she writes:

"Now Mother Aja sits quite alone in the tents of Kedar and hangs her harp on the willows—solitary as the grave—and desolate as a little owl in a deserted city."

We are glad to know that the Frau Rath's hospitality did not empty her purse; the duke sent her privately money to defray all expense.

At the end of 1780, the Herr Rath's health began to show further signs of failing. In

November, Frau Goethe writes to her friend Groszmann that the Herr Rath was sick to death, but is much better the last two days. Her lowness of spirits is revealed in the following letter to the duchess dated February 19, 1781 :

"The lovely spring-time is coming but I have no presentment of it or joy in it. If all the splendid things in the world are given to any one —of what use are they, if he has no one to talk to about it ? A blessing which we enjoy alone is only half a one—and that is almost my case—neither in nor out of the house have I any one with whom I can have a hearty chat."

Goethe's quick promotion had caused much jealousy at the Weimar court, and rumours of this seem to have reached Frau Aja's anxious ears. She writes to her son, June 17, 1781 :

"Von Kalb and von Seckendorf * have been to see me and appeared to be pleased, but since I know that the first is no longer so much your good friend, I was indeed quite courteous to him, but took care not, according to Frau Aja's usual custom, to burst into joy whenever your name was mentioned—on the contrary, I managed as well as if the great court had been my foster-mother. . . . What I ought to have written first comes now, namely, a thousand thanks for your letter, it gave me a splendid Thursday. But since it would be impossible for you to guess why

* Kammerpräsident and Kammerherr—President of the Chamber of Deputies and Chamberlain at Weimar.

this letter caused me so much delight, read on, and you will understand. On last Monday, 11th, I had just come home from my Monday meeting, when the maid said that Merck had called, and would come again next day. I took off my things and was just going to sit down to table (it was nearly ten o'clock) when Merck came again. I thought this late visit a little strange—and I was still more uneasy when he asked if I had no good news from Weimar. He further told me that von Kalb and von Seckendorf were again here, and he had spoken with them. 'I have no news at all from Weimar,' I said; 'you know, Herr Merck, that the people there do not often write—but if you know anything, say it—the Doctor is not ill?'—'No,' said he, 'I know nothing of that—but always and in every case you should seek to get him back here; he will certainly not be able to bear the infamous climate there. He has brought about the chief thing—the duke is now as he should be; all the other rubbish—another can manage; Goethe is too good,' and so on. Now you can easily imagine what I felt, since I firmly believed that von Kalb or Seckendorf had had some bad news from Weimar and had told it to Merck. As soon as I was alone, I got into a great fidget, first I would write to the duke, then to the duchess-mother, then to you.

"Thursday came, with your dear letter, before my writing—and since you write that you are well, my doubts are done away with for the present. Dear son! one word for a thousand, you must know best what is good for you—but since my position here is now that I am Lord and

Master, and so could get you good and peaceful days without being interfered with, you can easily think what a gain it would be to me. If you sacrificed your health and strength in official service, just to regret it afterwards, it would not be a thing to make me grow fat. . . But to tear you from your circle of activity without cause, would, on the other hand, be just as foolish. Therefore you are master of your fate—prove all and choose the best. I will in future make no report one way or the other—now you know my mind—there's an end. Indeed it would be nice if you could come at the autumn fair time and I could talk it all over with you. Your father is a poor man, bodily strength fairly good —but mind, so much the weaker—for the rest tolerably contented—only when he gets tired of doing nothing—then it is fatal. He took great delight in the repairs in the lower story—he shows my sitting-room, which is now quite finished, to everybody, and says, 'There, Frau Aja did that, is it not pretty?' Now the kitchen is being done, that also amuses him much, and I thank God for the good idea I had—the summer will be got over very well in this way (for I shall not have it finished until August) and the future must take care for the winter."

Here we get a pitiful peep at the poor old Rath, now seventy-one years of age, his former dominant temper turned to feeble peevishness, so that his wife, in her tenderness for him, is glad of any means of amusing him and shortening the

tedious time. It shows her thoughtful wisdom that she takes advantage of his old love of house-decoration, still a prominent trait in his failing mind, and tries to revive his interest in the house, of which he was once so proud, by having the rooms renewed and discussing repairs with him. She now has the reins of government in her own hands, is able to promise her son quietness and undisturbed leisure, should he elect to leave court life and return to her. He is a man of thirty-two now, and she shows her wisdom by not trying to persuade him; he is of age to judge for himself; much as she would like to have him, she will not influence him unduly. We also note that she values courtly honours and titles not a whit, except in so far as they are for his real welfare. "Life comes before the finest affair," she tells him.

He rewards her kindness by perfect confidence, his answer is full and decisive.

"Merck and others judge very falsely of my situation; they see only what I sacrifice and not what I gain; and they cannot comprehend that I grow daily richer while I daily give up so much. You remember the last period I passed with you before I came here; in such a continued state of things I should have gone to ruin. The disproportion of a narrow and slowly moving burgher circle to the breadth and mobility of my nature would have driven me mad. With my lively imagination and

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previous ideas of human affairs, I should yet have always remained unacquainted with the world, and in a perpetual childhood which mostly through self-conceit and all its kindred errors is intolerable to itself and to others. How much more fortunate it was to see myself placed in a position to which I was in no direction equal, where I had ample opportunity, through many an error of misconception and haste, to become acquainted with myself and others; where, left to myself and fate, I passed through so many trials which to many hundreds of men might not have been necessary, but of which I had, for my development, the utmost need. And now still how could I in accordance with my nature wish for a position more fortunate than one which has in it, for me, something infinite. For where there developed daily in me a new capacity, where my ideas were constantly becoming clearer, my active powers augmenting, my knowledge extending itself, my powers of discrimination being perfected and my spirit becoming more active, I should yet find daily opportunity to use all these qualities now on a large scale, now on a small. You see how far I am from hypochondriacal restlessness, which sets so many men at variance with their circumstances, and that only the very weightiest considerations, or very strange and unexpected events, could induce me to leave my post. Meantime believe me that a large share of the good courage with which I endure and work springs from the thought that all these sacrifices are voluntary and that I only need order post-horses to find with you again the necessaries and

pleasures of life with unconstrained rest. For without this prospect, if I were forced in hours of vexation to consider myself a bond-servant and day labourer for necessity's sake, many things would be much bitterer to me."

This surely is a most interesting correspondence, because of its revelation of the characters of both the mother and her great son; that he was so sure of comprehension from her is the truest testimony to her strong, good sense.

The calm self-survey of the second letter is exceedingly Goetheresque. Goethe knew that his chief duty to himself and to his fellow-men was self-development. Fate had decreed that his life should be laid in pleasant pastures; he must at all costs obtain a more varied knowledge of men and human affairs.

Had he remained in Frankfurt, quietly following the law, or even producing from his inner consciousness sweet lyrics and dramas acted by imaginary creations, whilst leading the monotonous life of a burgher, if he had not passed through the wild exciting period of youthful friendship with Karl August, followed by years of effort, if he had not known the Duchess Luise, had not lived intimately with Wieland, Merck, von Knebel, Herder, and the rest in that circle of brilliant minds, could we have had from him the wondrous imagination and wisdom of

Faust or the varied philosophy of the *Wilhelm Meister?*

Yet he proudly remembered that he was "the citizen of no mean city," and court life must be a means not an end. Independent he would remain in the highest sense, though necessarily dependent in his need for experience of life and humanity.

The natures of men are instruments played on by Life varyingly. Goethe's nature was of almost infinite compass. Life struck from it grand harmonies and, alas! pitiful discords. His mother's nature was in perfect unison with his, but Life drew from it only harmony.

These letters of Goethe and his mother seem to prove that Merck, whose admiration and disinterested regard for Goethe are indubitable, had some misgivings lest court life should belittle and vitiate a mind so open to influence as the poet's.

But if Goethe's mind easily took reflections from those surrounding him, they were only surface reflections. The composition of it was not thereby deteriorated, but enriched.

CHAPTER XV

WIDOWHOOD

Wer nie sein Brod mit Thränen asz,
Wer nie die kummervollen Nächte
Auf seinen Bette weinend sasz,
Der kennt euch nicht, ihr himmlischen Mächte.*
Wilhelm Meister.

FRAU Goethe never left her ailing husband. On August 20, 1781, she writes to Lavater:

"I for my part find myself, thank God, ever the same, well, cheerful and in good temper, but the poor Herr Rath is for the last year, every day more failing—particularly his mental power has quite gone—memory, recollection—all quite gone. The life he now leads is merely a plant's life. Providence is pleased to lead me by all manner of ways to the end—for that I suffer most intensely needs no telling, to such a feeling soul as you are—especially since I have none of

* Who never ate his bread in sorrow,
Who never spent the darksome hours
Weeping and watching for the morrow,
He knows ye not, ye unseen [1] powers.
Trans. CARLYLE.

1 Heavenly?

my children to depend on. All are far, far away from poor Frau Aja—I had flattered myself that my son would come for the autumn fair, but it has come to nothing. He has so much business to do at once—but he has written me in excuse a lovely letter, so I must possess my soul in patience."

On May 25, 1782, the end came. Frau Aja writes in June to the duchess thus:

"The sympathy of your Highness on the death of my husband has touched me much. Indeed an improvement was impossible; what took place on 25th May was expected daily—still I did not think it would be so soon. It is well with him, for God preserve every one from such a life as his during the last two years!"

The great Goethe house now seems terribly sad and empty to the widow and mother. In October she tells the duchess, who has inquired what she is doing:

"Very little and that badly—but how could it be otherwise?—solitary and quite alone, left to myself. For him whose supplies are cut off, the deepest well is empty—I dig indeed for fresh—but either there is no water—or it is very turbid and both these things are bad. I might carry on this fine allegory infinitely—might say that not to die of thirst I must drink mineral water, which is only fit for invalids. . . . All the pleasure I now enjoy I must seek among strangers away from home—for it is as quiet and deserted there

as a churchyard. Once it was quite otherwise. But as in all nature nothing remains in its place—how can I be an exception—no, Frau Aja does not think so foolishly. Who will grumble because it is not always full moon and because the sun is not so warm now as in July? Just to make the best of the present and not keep thinking how things might be different; that is how one gets best through the world—and to get through (all things considered) is the chief business. From the above your Highness will see that Frau Aja is still the same Frau Aja, keeps her good humour, and does everything to remain good-tempered—and uses industriously the same means that once King Saul used against his evil enemy."

Of course Frau Aja is referring to music, which she found a real solace. Thus we see she bore up bravely, asking no commiseration.

"I never could endure consolation, very few people are in a position to realise the condition of the sorrowful and so are poor comforters," she says with true insight.

As we should expect, her thoughts now turned to Weimar. She says in a letter to the duchess:

"Now Frau Aja tells herself the most splendid stories of a journey to Weimar. I hope confidently that heaven will grant me this extraordinary joy—but it cannot indeed be so soon—still patience! I wish first to bring our tangled affairs into order, and then with the wings of the wind I will hasten to that place which holds all

that in the round world is high, dear and precious to me."

Yet in spite of her eagerness the poet's mother never went to Weimar. We do not exactly know the reason. Her husband's death left her free to act as she wished. Her son was now her one consideration and that he wished her to pay the visit is clear.

It is possible that she felt intuitively that she would not shine among those aristocrats whose life was so different from her own. The homely humour which sparkled so brightly in her *bürgerlich* home would lose its radiance in a different setting.

Though Goethe's duke and his duchess had tastes almost as simple as the poet's own, there was not wanting in their court that element of sneering frivolity which passes for brilliancy with the empty-minded. Frau Aja's homely wit and geniality would have been confused and possibly hurt by the contact.

Soon after this time Goethe's intercourse with Karl August became slightly strained. Goethe had emerged from the age of youthful folly, while the prince was still floundering in the shifty quicksand. Goethe, the Controller of Finance, was becoming somewhat a mentor to his master. Frau Aja's relation to court personages was entirely regulated by that of her son. The Herr

Kammerpräsident was, in her eyes, of far more importance than Kaiser, Pope, or Duke.

A letter from Duchess Amalia of this period seems to point to a slight cooling of friendship between the mothers.

"Since," she writes, "spirits, prophets, geniuses, and such-like have lodged with you, one hears nothing either good or bad of Frau Aja: all is dead from there here. So I dare only, quite from a distance, knock on the door of the blue room and ask if things are going well with the Frau Räthin, whether she sometimes casts a side glance on her distant friends. If I come inopportunely with my questions and disturb her meditations, she must pardon my desire to hear something of Frau Aja after so long a silence. I could tell many fine things of here—but what would you care, you who are apparently busied with such high thoughts beside which earthly stuff is mere trifling?"

The note of sarcasm and reproof is unmistakable.

This letter was written before the birth of the duchess's grandson, the son and heir of the Duke of Weimar, which took place on February 2, 1783. Frau Goethe's letter of congratulation to Amalia on that occasion has the usual rather exaggerated tone she uses when writing to royalty. "She dreamt," she says, "she was in Weimar. What a joy it all was! only misery when she woke: all the blessedness had vanished."

After 1787 correspondence between the two ladies ceases, though they continued to communicate through their mutual friend Merck.

It is quite likely that increasing years had something to do with the discontinuance of their letters. Frau Aja was fifty-eight, she suffered with rheumatism in her hand which made her writing, never of the best, very crabbed; she could not see well by candle-light; she is more fond of talking than writing. The duchess had probably similar reasons for being less industrious as a scribe.

Some years later, under special circumstances, we shall find the duchess urgently repeating her invitation to the poet's mother to visit Weimar. Frau Aja declines very respectfully, but a little distantly.

She was now sixty years of age and disliked taking even a short journey.

We can form a very clear idea of the Räthin's daily doings at this time of her life. She continued living in the great house for thirteen years after the death of her husband. She writes to her son:

"My life flows quietly as a clear rivulet. Unrest and tumult were never my business, and I thank Providence for my condition. Thousands would find such a life too monotonous, but not I; the more peaceful my body is, the more active is

that in me which thinks. I can pass a whole day quite alone, be surprised when evening comes, and be as happy as a goddess—and more than happy and contented needs no one in the world to be."

Ever since those days when the Herr Rath had lectured, in the long winter evenings, to wife and children on his Italian travels and made projects for a tour his son should some day make there, the poet had passionately desired to see that land of artistic and natural beauty. In the year 1786 he was at last able to indulge his wish.

He was weary of court life with its frivolity and unrest; he longed for serenity and solitude. How greatly he was in need of these is forcibly shown by a letter from Wieland to Merck.

"Goethe," so it runs, "manages to make the most sensible suggestions, is indeed *l'honnête homme à la cour*, but suffers terribly in body and soul from the burdens which for our sakes he has incurred. It sometimes pains me to the heart to see how good a face he assumes while sorrow, like a worm in the bud, is silently tormenting him. He takes care of his health as well as he is able, indeed he has need."

The anxious mother heard something of this; her son thus comforts her:

"You have never known me strong in stomach and head; and that one must be serious in serious matters stands to reason, especially when one is in earnest and desires the good and true. . . . I am,

for me, tolerably well, am able to work, and enjoy myself with my good friends, and still have time for my favourite pursuits. I could not wish to be in a better place. . . . And you must make yourself happy about me, and should I have to quit the world first, you will not need to be ashamed of me; I shall leave behind me a good name and good friends, so you will have the consolation of knowing that *I am not entirely dead.* Meanwhile rest in peace; fate may yet give us a pleasant old age; if so we will accept that too gratefully."

This letter clearly points to dyspepsia. Goethe tried such a remedy as his mother would have recommended, had he consulted her. He resolved to steal away alone incognito. He revealed his plans but partially to his friend the duke, but to no one else, not even to his mother. She knew nothing of the journey until a letter from Rome took her by surprise, as her answer will show:

"Dear Son!—An apparition from the lower world could not have amazed me more than your letter from Rome. I rejoiced that the wish, that from your earliest youth lay near your soul, is now being fulfilled. A man like you, with your knowledge, with your clear, wide insight into all that is good, great and beautiful, with such an eagle eye, such a journey must make happy for the rest of his life—and not yourself alone but all those who belong to your circle."

He intends visiting her on his return, so she ends thus:

"You will before you come let me hear something, or else I shall think every post-chaise is bringing me my only beloved one—and hope deceived is not much after my mind. Farewell dearest! and think often of thy true mother

"ELIZABETH GOETHE."

The visit so longed for had to be postponed. Later, Goethe paid his mother several visits, in 1791–92, 93, 97, thereby giving her the greatest pleasure.

After Frankfurt had, for the third time during her remembrance, been the scene of a coronation and all its attendant excitement, she writes:

"After the great hurly-burly that we have had here, it is now as if depopulated—that suits me very well. I can let my hobby-horses gallop along all the more quietly—I have four of them —I am as fond of one as of the other, and often don't know which to take first. Sometimes it is making Brabant lace, which I have learnt in my old age and take quite a childish delight in, then comes clavier-playing—then reading—then the long given up, but now resumed chess. The Countess von Usenburg is living with me, who is also very fond of that game; when we are both at home of an evening, which, I am thankful to say, often happens, we have a game, and forget the whole world—and amuse ourselves royally."

In the mornings she attends to her housekeeping and writes letters. "Such an amusing correspondence it is," she says. Each month she

clears out her desk, "but never can do so without laughing"—all rank there is forgotten—high and low, pious, publicans and sinners are heaped together. The letters of the pious Lavater hob-nob with those of the actor Groszmann, and so on.

In the afternoon her friends visit her, but all have to go by four o'clock; then she dresses herself and drives either to the theatre or to make calls—returning home at nine in the evening.

We are not surprised to find the mother of Goethe a theatre-goer. She had no great respect for the Frankfurt audience. She writes to Groszmann the theatre manager:

"How are you getting on in Bonn? Are you satisfied? Have the people taste? Perhaps more than the Frankfurters. The favourable reception of *Hamlet* has almost made me respect our public, but, looked at in the light, it was nothing, simply nothing—with just a few exceptions they reason like horses. A few days back I met in society a lady of the so-called great world, who let fall the judgment that *Hamlet* was nothing but a farce. O! ! ! Godfather! Godfather! Hamlet a farce! ! ! ! ! I thought I should faint on the spot. Another said, 'might the devil take him if he could not write just such a foolish thing himself,' and this was a stout, robust wine merchant. There is now such a screeching about our century, about enlightened times and so forth, and still (with the exception of a few, who are indeed the salt of the earth)

among these gentlemen and ladies all is so vapid, so pitiful, so out of place, so stunted that they cannot eat and digest a piece of beef. Porridge—frozen stuff, sugar-plums—such things are their refreshment. Indeed they destroy their digestion thus more and more. But who can help it?"

And again:

"When in the tumult and pressure of my heart at *Hamlet*, overcome by my inward feeling and emotion, I gasp for breath, some one sitting near me, stares at me, and says, 'It is not true, they are only acting.' Now it is just this elemental and strong natural feeling which preserves my soul (and God be forever blessed that it is so) from rust and decay."

Her great interest in the stage was of course fostered by her son's effort to develop and exalt it in Weimar. Many times she commends some rising actor to her son's notice.

When Unzelmann, a young actor, joined the Frankfurt company in 1784, she took him up somewhat over-zealously, helping his extravagance with loans of money, in fact making him her *protégé*.

But the Frankfurt public would have none of him. It laughed at him instead of shuddering when he appeared as Franz Moor in Schiller's *Robbers*. He played his best but laugh it would. This angered Frau Aja, who took the part of her offended favourite enthusiastically.

"The generation of vipers," she declared of his depreciators, "shall be banished from my house; no drop of tyrant's blood shall touch their tongues."

What worse chastisement could she inflict?

She continued her generous support of Unzelmann and his wife. Then all of a sudden, to the distress of her upright soul, he decamped, breaking his contract with the Frankfurt theatre, and took an engagement in Berlin. In her disappointment and vexation she thus reproves him:

"So you have decided, because of your false and quite misplaced pride, you will destroy the love of your true friends and cast yourself to misfortune. Has not your hot, passionate, impetuous nature already caused enough worry—will you never take the counsel of tried, true friends—friends to whom you owe so many thanks? . . . Ach! my poor hobby," she quaintly laments. "It was such a good, beneficent, harmless beast, and now for want of nourishment as lean as a rake, like the Pope in the Dance of Death at Basle."

Schiller did not think Unzelmann suitable for tragedy.

Some years later Frau Aja's disappointing *protégé* and particularly his wife became successful actors in Berlin. Then Frau Goethe in her hearty way was quite ready to rejoice, even

though her own poor hobby was not in the running.

For a time, however, she took the ingratitude of her favourite seriously to heart. This, coupled with a far more tragic event, weighed heavily on her bright spirit, and even affected her health. This latter event was the death of her old friend Merck, the cynical, true, Mephistophelian friend of her son: the man who with clear insight had pointed out the right path to the poet, telling him, "your effort, your undeviating bent, is to give reality to poetic form; others seek to make real the so-called poetic and imaginative and that leads to nothing but foolish stuff." He who could thus point the way to others had himself lost his way in the great mysterious maze of life.

Having been a successful man, having risen from quite humble origin to be the able councillor and financier of the Duke of Weimar, he in his eightieth year entered into a speculation which proved a failure, led to bankruptcy and disgrace, to sickness, hypochondria, suicide!

No wonder Frau Aja herself fell ill for a time.

Each new book of her son's, however, brought her keen pleasure, to talk them over with her Frankfurt friends, to read out extracts from them; during a social evening, to sing the songs, the company joining in the chorus, were her great

delights. "He is my son!" she would exclaim rapturously at the end.

It was her nature to be enthusiastic and we must remember that Goethe was attracting the attention of the whole of Germany. The conjunction of the two great literary stars, Goethe and Schiller, was a unique event: all eyes were turned towards Weimar and Jena in expectation of great things.

Frau Aja could review her son's works critically. An English gentleman, Charles Robinson,* travelling in those parts, who called to see the mother of the literary lion, was much impressed by her strong personality. Discussing *Werther* with him, she pointed out the difference in the delineation of the character of the hero in the first and second parts.

She writes to thank her son for the first part of *Wilhelm Meister*. "Everybody," she tells him, "is mad for the continuation of the story—and is looking with impatience for the following parts." How that little-exciting novel could have caused such a sensation in Frankfurt society is difficult to imagine. It is perhaps impossible for English readers to give unqualified approbation to *Wilhelm Meister*, so prolix, so disconnected is it. The hero, weak and insipid, irritates us. The innumerable persons who surround him bewilder us.

* See p. 165

Page after page wearies and offends, yet now and again a sentence, a paragraph, flashes with supreme insight, and, by-and-by, some marvellous passage holds us spell-bound: then we forgive the author our toil, we know that we are listening to a master in the school of life, to one who has wrestled with Experience and made her yield her wisdom.

When we reach the end and close the tedious volumes—we are tired—we feel as if we had been a long journey—seen many places—spoken with all kinds of men—we rejoice that it is over—rejoice still more that we have dared to cross that wild country, for our views of the world, of man, of many things, are widened, deepened and made greatly tolerant.

The mother of Germany's foremost poet loved the German type in printing; the Latin characters she cannot tolerate. When she receives a copy of *Wilhelm Meister* she writes:

"What splendid paper and what excellent type!! It is a pleasure to read—a thousand thanks that you have not had the noble work printed with Latin type."

And again:

"Now a word about Latin type—the harm it does humanity I will make clear to you. It is like a pleasure garden which belongs to the aristocracy, where no one but the nobility and people with stars and ribbons may enter; our

German type is like the Präter * in Vienna, over the entrance to which the Emperor Joseph had written 'For all men'—if your writings were printed in the fatal aristocratic type they would not have become so universal, in spite of all their excellence. Tailors' seamstresses—servant girls all read them—each finds something that so entirely fits his feeling—in a word, they keep step with the literature of the age. What harm Hufland has done by having his excellent book printed in a type not understood by the largest half of mankind! Are then only people of rank to be enlightened? are the poorer to be shut off from all good? It will be so if this fashionable tomfoolery is not left off. From you, my dear son, I hope, I hope never to receive such an inhuman production."

During the past quarter of a century, scarcely a book has appeared bearing on human life without the name of Goethe figuring somewhere in its pages. In works of such varied character as biographies, philosophical books, scientific treatises, in irresponsible neurotic novels, he is quoted and discussed. This fact proves beyond question that he is one of the mighty influences of thought. What particular niche will be eventually assigned him, in the "Hall of the Past," by that opinion of the ages which is not public opinion nor the opinion of criticism, is yet to be revealed.

* Public Park.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SATURDAY GIRLS

" Cheerfulness is the mother of all virtues."
Götz von Berlichingen.

IN one of Frau Aja's letters we have heard mention of the " Saturday girls," and a short chapter must be devoted to them and her other young friends.

No one had a more perfect sympathy with, and understanding of young folk, than had Frau Aja ; she liked to have their bright, untroubled faces round her. She was one of those who discreetly look another way when an innocent piece of delightful mischief is going forward.

The following anecdote will show Frau Aja as a lover and condoner of merry mischief.

Two little princesses * from the Weimar court came to pay the Goethe house and its mistress a visit, accompanied by the thin German-French governess, so abhorrent to Frau Aja's genial soul.

* Afterwards Queen of Prussia and Duchess of Mecklenburg.

FRAU AJA'S PUMP

Now the Goethe house was looked upon by these children from the Weimar court as a veritable holiday-house. All the formality of court etiquette, which weighed so heavily on their childish spirits at home, was left outside on the three white doorsteps of that hospitable mansion. To look at the lovely things in Frau Aja's yellow room, to revel in Frau Aja's delicious cakes and sweetmeats *ad libitum*, to race up and down Frau Aja's wide landings or to slide down the iron balusters was heavenly; but better than all this, a treat beyond compare was to pump up water with Frau Aja's pump.

To pump water, however, was not a fit occupation for princesses. How could a thin German-French governess who possessed a conscience allow it? How should she answer for rumpled ribbons and soiled frocks? Of course such a governess could never be made to understand how perfectly entrancing it was to hang on a heavy iron handle and hear the water splash into the pail, just like fat Lieszel did; but dear Frau Aja understood quite well, she knew such a delightful opportunity was not to be wasted. She not only knew, she tried her best to explain to the governess. But the governess was obdurate, and then Frau Aja did a splendid thing. She managed to lock the cross old creature up in a room, so that for once the little princesses had a

real good time, like little burgher girls; and when at last it was over, and they had to return to Weimar and good behaviour, they told Frau Aja that never in their formal little lives had they had so much fun as they had that afternoon in the delightful Goethe house.

In a letter Frau Aja tells of these merry times.

"The princesses and the Crown Prince will never forget the youthful delights they enjoyed in my house—they were there quite released from stiff court etiquette and had perfect freedom—dancing, singing and springing the whole day long. Every day at noon they would come armed with three forks to my little table—stuck them into everything that came to hand—how delicious it tasted—after dinner the future queen played on the piano and the prince and I waltzed—afterwards I had to tell them stories of former coronations and so on. All this impressed itself so firmly on their young minds that they all three never forgot it amid all their future grandeur, they would call it to mind at every opportunity."

So it is not difficult to understand why the children loved Frau Aja. She was wont to boast that no human soul ever went away from her displeased, of whatever rank, age or sex.

"I am fond of my fellows," she says in her hearty way, "and old and young feel it. I go through this world without pretence, and all the sons and daughters of Eve find that comfortable. I demoralise no one—seek always to spy out the good

side—leave the bad to Him who made men and understands best how to rub off the sharp corners; and in this way, I am well, happy and pleased." As were her guests.

Frau Aja's Saturday girls were a characteristic institution. Every Saturday a group of the young girls of the neighbourhood assembled round her. Very much did they enjoy these snug afternoons with dear Frau Aja, for she mingled her wise counsel with her delicious pastry and cakes; earnest chats were made palatable by merry games. Then came delightful descriptions of the gay doings at the Weimar court, of which Frau Aja's poet was the hero; of course all the Saturday girls admired him and his poetry with the enthusiasm of young romance. There were all the presents in the Weimar room to be looked at, there were letters from the duchess and her weird maid of honour, Louise von Göchhausen, to be read.

Sometimes Frau Aja would read aloud portions of her son's books, sometimes they would sing his songs, but the cream of all was when she herself would tell her wonderful fairy-tales.

One of the Saturday girls gives us this peep at them and Frau Aja:

"To the characteristics of Goethe's extraordinary mother, I should add that she had a singular art of stimulating young and active minds,

and that out of the treasures of her own experience she instructed them in the science of life. How did we hang on her lips, when in her joyous yet earnest manner she related to us, then girls of twelve or fourteen, a story of Musaeus or Wieland, or recited a poem of her son."

Another young friend tells of her :

"After dinner she related a little fable : all were gathered round her in solemn stillness. At first she was prolix, perhaps the large audience might make her a trifle nervous, but soon all the capable *dramatis personæ*, most fantastically adorned, were dancing away in their grotesque fashion upon the great show-box of her memory."

Here we recognise unmistakably the mother of the author of *Wilhelm Meister*.

Frau Aja did not supply only mental pabulum : her good things to eat were as popular among the Saturday girls as her stories.

She writes to the duchess asking whether she would like a fresh supply of her pastry, adding, "To judge from the appetites of the Saturday girls your little store must long ago have been exhausted."

But Frau Aja was equally popular with the boys. Sometimes she had a boy visitor, then her cosy temperament made the stay very pleasant. The twelve-year-old Friedrich, or Fritz, Freiherr von Stein was a great favourite of hers. She

corresponded with the boy before they met, and evidently he took a fancy to his unseen correspondent, as this answer to one of his boyish letters will prove :

" It is a great sign of your love and friendship that you ask for a close description of my person. I send you two silhouettes—the nose indeed is a little too big in the large one—and too young in the little one—but for all that on the whole they are a good deal like. In person I am tolerably tall, stout, have brown eyes and hair—and fancy I should do very well for the mother of Prince Hamlet [a piece of fun : she was no tragedy queen]. Many people, the Princess of Dessau among them, assert that no one could fail to recognise Goethe as my son, but I can't see it—still there must be something in it as it is so constantly asserted. Order and rest are the chief traits of my character—therefore I do everything straight off—the most disagreeable always first — and swallow down the devil (after the wise advice of friend Wieland) without looking long at him ; then when everything is again in the old folds—all the uneven made smooth—then I challenge any one to beat me in good temper. Now, dear son, just come and see all for yourself—I will do all in my power to give you joy and pleasure."

The invitation was accepted, and she amply fulfilled her promise.

At breakfast she regaled her boy visitor on delicious pears whilst she sipped tea—then both

guest and hostess submitted severally to the important operation of hair-powdering, having each their special powderers; then after completing their toilets in the elaborate fashion of the time with ruffles and lace, the lady of fifty-four and the gallant of twelve sat down *vis-à-vis* to dinner. Dinner over, at two o'clock the hostess sent the youngster out to enjoy himself, boy-fashion, at the autumn fair, which was then in full progress.

They met again later at the theatre, and the play over, they drove home to supper. After supper Lieszel was ordered to put lights in the large hall, and here they sang songs and had rare fun until bedtime. The boy thoroughly enjoyed his visit.

Frau Aja sometimes gives good advice to her little friend in her letters.

"I am particularly pleased," she writes in answer to one from him, "that you know so well your good and not good points. Bravo! dear son! that is the only way to be noble, great and useful to mankind. A man who does not know his faults, or will not know them, will in the end become intolerable, vain, full of pretension—intolerant—no one can endure him—even if he is the greatest genius. I know many a striking example. But we must know the good in us; that is just as necessary, just as useful. A man who does not know what he is worth, who does not know his own strength, has consequently no

faith in himself, is a noodle who can take no firm step or walk, but always remains in leading-strings and *in seculum seculorum* remains a child."

In one of her letters to this boy correspondent she makes this pathetic little request:

"Many thanks for your dear letter, it gave me great joy. You enjoy being with my son—oh, I can well imagine that. Goethe was always the friend of brave young people, and it pleases me uncommonly that intercourse with him makes you happy. But the dearer he is to you, and therefore you would certainly not like to do without him, so much the more surely will you believe me when I say that absence from him often gives me hours of sadness. You, my little friend, could do a great, good work—and since you are fond of me, it will certainly not seem hard to you. Listen, dear friend, to my proposal,—as you are constantly with my son and therefore know more about him than any one, how would it be if you kept a small diary, and sent it to me every month? It would not give you much work, only something after this style: 'Yesterday Goethe was at the theatre, in the evening was invited out—to-day we had company,' and so on. In this way I should be living in the midst of you—your joys would be mine—and absence would lose much of its unpleasantness. A short line written morning or evening would give you little trouble, but would do me untold good. Consider the matter a little I believe it could be done."

It is satisfactory to find that Goethe's clever little admirer and friend responded warmly. On February 12, 1784, Frau Goethe writes her thanks:

"Dear Son!—It is splendid, that you have kept your promise so well—the diary is quite splendid, and I am extremely delighted with it—do me the kindness to send such a description every month, of your life and your doings—my son's absence will be greatly lightened for me by it, because I can enjoy in fancy all that is done and goes on in Weimar. I beg you go on with it and you shall be my dear, dear son."

And again, March 22:

"Dear Son!—Your letter, the description of the trip to Ilmenau, the printed reports of the speeches, the flowers, the drawings of the miners, and, above all, what you have written to me, has made me very happy. No, I never have had such an industrious correspondent, it will be a great pleasure to me if you will continue; the smallest event you tell me about has charm for me, all that happens in the great world interests me."

Goethe had visited Ilmenau in his official capacity. As Controller of the Finances he had brought about the reopening of the mines. This was the event which so much interested the mother, who was present only in spirit. Goethe made a speech. He was at the time overworked,

and not in good health ; in the midst of the oration his memory failed, he faltered, but a spectator tells us he kept his perfect self-possession, conscious of the power of his personality ; he gazed steadily and quietly round for about ten minutes until he became master of his errant thought, whilst during this trying pause his audience remained perfectly quiet and respectful.

It is little to be wondered at that Frau Aja cherished such glimpses of her renowned son.

Readers may be interested in this later glimpse of the poet-statesman seen with the eyes of Varnhagen von Ense, a military gentleman, who, with his uncle, passing through Weimar, begged an interview of Goethe, who, by-the-by, objected almost as greatly as Kitchener to the "interviewer." This is Varnhagen's description of it, written for the benefit of Rahel his wife ; the date is 1793, Goethe being forty-four at the time :

"We were taken up two staircases. Below in the wall before the first staircase, in a kind of niche, stood statues of Apollo and Antinous, life-size. The stairs led to an ante-room, wherein several pictures, chiefly heads, were hanging ; from this room we entered a small, elegant one at the same moment as Goethe himself, whom we had seen coming from another part of the house and passing through several rooms. He did not

keep us waiting two minutes. The first thing which struck me and which you will wish to know about, was his figure. He is far above the usual height, and proportionally big and broad-shouldered. . . . His forehead is extraordinarily fine, finer than I have ever seen; the eyebrows are exact in the picture, but the full brown eyes are more undercut than shown there. . . .

"There is much spirit in his eyes, but not the devouring fire, about which there is so much talk. . . . The nose is a decidedly hawk-nose, only the depression in the middle is very gradual (I had a good look at him—whilst he was asking my uncle several questions—both in profile, and at his reflection in the mirror). The mouth is very beautiful, small and very mobile. When he is silent, he looks very earnest, but certainly not surly, and with not a thought, not a trace of arrogance. But only the stupidest could see arrogance in a man who, in speech and manner, is as simple as any man of business. The face is full, with rather down-hanging cheeks. . . . He has a manly, very brown complexion. The colour of the hair is somewhat lighter (than in the portrait): he wears his front hair close cut, combed out at the sides, and setting quite flat, with a long queue powdered. . . . His cravat is just like that of other men, buckled at the back, smooth and small in front; and because the shirt collar is turned down over it, is not much seen. His linen is fine with no great protruding frill. Clothing: a blue overcoat with engraved buttons, double collar (one over the shoulders, the other not standing very high); a narrow striped

waistcoat of Manchester cloth, or some such material, and—probably breeches (they were hidden by the overcoat), and usually boots. Taken altogether, he might pass for a minister, a councillor of war, a privy councillor anyway, an official, only not a learned man, certainly not a virtuoso. In Berlin every one would take him for a native. He received us very courteously: as he came towards us he looked at us in a very friendly way. . . . When he is not addressing any one, he looks down on the ground, with his hands behind his back, and talks like that. He asked the purpose of our journey, talked about the war operations, but spoke for neither party decisively; he always spoke naturally, always as if he considered the matter rather than the words. . . . The room in which we stood (he did not ask us to sit down) was decorated with green tapestry, pictures and heads around; it was a perfect square; there were two mahogany tables, a looking-glass, six cane chairs, white with a little green and green striped cushions. He kept us a quarter of an hour more or less; then, with a smiling manner, gave us a hint, which we were not too dense to take. . . . He walked with us as far as the ante-room and took leave with much courtesy. The whole reception was very civil, somewhat cool and stand-offish, but still much warmer than I had expected; it was what I should have expected had no one ever described Goethe to me."

The writer adds a suggestive fact which only concerns the subject of our sketch indirectly

through the son, who engrossed her every thought.

"Goethe has no longer any legal business; his office is the Department of Pardoning [no fanciful, but an actual name]; he chose the post himself."

And once again:

"Goethe is acknowledged by many classes of people (I have talked to several about it) to be very kind and good-natured, and has won universal love and esteem; the middle classes call him 'the genius of the place.' It would be difficult to be pedantic in Weimar. . . . He comes to court; but when the grandees dine with the duke, he cannot be induced to come to table. Familiar acquaintance with him is very difficult to obtain; of all those to whom I have spoken not one knew of any person with whom he is really intimate."*

Frau Aja writes often and lovingly to her granddaughters, poor Cornelia's children, sending their little gifts and receiving their small offerings with delight.

"If I was with you," she writes, "I would teach you all kinds of games, as Vögel verkaufen [selling birds]—Tuchdiebes [Steal the handkerchief]—Potz schimper potz schemper, and many others. These are very merry for children, and you know

* *Aus dem Nachlass Varnhagen von Ense.*

well that thegr andmother likes to be merry herself and make others merry."

There is no need to quote further from these letters. Every one who has had a kind grandmother knows what would be in them.

CHAPTER XVII

FAREWELL TO THE GOETHE HOUSE

Willst du dir ein hübsch Leben zimmern,
Muszt dich ums Vergangne nicht bekummern
Das Wenigste musz dich verdrieszen;
Muszt stets die Gegenwart genieszen,
Besonders keinen Menschen hassen
Und die Zukunft Gott überlassen.

GOETHE: *Lebensregel.*

BUT Frau Aja's peaceful and uneventful life was soon to be disturbed.

The whirlwind of war was again hurtling towards Frankfurt and Weimar. The party of the revolution in Paris had forced their unfortunate monarch to declare war with the Emperor of Germany and the allied Powers. The old discomfort of "billeting" again fell upon the house in the Hirsch Graben Street.

* If thou wishest life to bless thee,
Never let the past distress thee,
Let nothing give thee much annoy,
Be sure the present to enjoy,
And above all things never hate,
But leave the future to God and fate.

Rule of Life.

Farewell to the Goethe House

On December 14, 1792, the Räthin writes to her son :

"We live here in daily anxiety and danger—and if I had a grain more fear, which thank God I have not, I should go into the wide world—but as it is I ought to and must abide in patience. . . I have an officer and two common soldiers quartered here ; they are Hessians—good people but (between ourselves) very poor—I have to feed them. The French had enough and to spare.* You can easily imagine that the catering is very inconvenient—but since every one has to do it, there's nothing to be said."

And a few days later :

"We live here in fear and expectation of what may happen—those in highest position and high rulers assure us indeed that all will go well, that is, being interpreted, that the French will not return—but as long as Maintz is not in German hands—we dare not cry 'Victoria.'"

It was at this time that the Duchess Amalia again urged Frau Aja to go to Weimar, to avoid the disturbance and danger of war, but in vain. Frau Goethe enjoined her son to thank the princess and to say that she trusted that God, who had brought her thus far, would still care for her.

Billeting becomes more onerous : on New Year's Day 1793, she complains :

"God preserve our town from a bombardment—

* Referring to the billeting of 1759.

for then we might all become poor and wretched—but we will trust in God—and wish happiness and blessing to Germany. My condition [thank] God, is very good; I am well and happy—bear what I cannot alter with patience—wait for better times, and do not worry about the present—only between ourselves the German quartering is very burdensome—with the French, if one had common men, one had no officers, and *vice versa*. Now I have two officers and two common men—so now they have commandeered not one room but two, which, with wood so dear, is no good speculation—besides the common French had meat, rice and bread in abundance—these have nothing but wretched bread. The French officers would sooner have died of starvation than have begged for anything, these one has to supply, even the sentries. *Summa summarum* it is a great burden—mine are Hessians—how it is with the Prussians I don't know—there, now you know about my situation.'

Another time she exclaims:

"If but these children of men would not smoke tobacco all day long! My room looks like a guard-room."

Next year things are no better, billeting continues, nay, grows worse.

"We have again winter quartering in full," she tells her son. "Three battalions of Prussian Guards—so many wounded and sick that the authorities were compelled to announce double billeting. We shall see how we can pull through—only the wood is an expensive item—

thou sawest how well I had provided myself for two years—but! but! it goes apace. My sick colonel, as is natural, cannot stir out: so all day the heating must be kept up; if I get another it will be a fine thing. What will be the end of it? That I suspect even great politicians do not know—enough, we are in a *wirrwar*—it cannot be worse. Let us leave the affair to go as it will—not worry beforehand—get through our days as comfortably as we may—for we cannot (without being crushed) touch the spokes of fate's wheel."

Yet she finds pleasure in taking care of her unbidden guests and feeding them up. She has a lieutenant, shot through the breast, besides a surgeon and two servants.

"They think themselves in Paradise," she says. "But how they devour!! They were so starved it was pitiful. Yesterday I had roast pork served up to them—it was a royal pleasure."

One is not surprised that all the confusion and hubbub of near war worries poor Frau Aja a little; she is now sixty-three, and though she puts the best face on the matter, she does find it a trial to have only one room for eating, drinking, sleeping and receiving visitors; to know that the town might be taken by the French republican troops, and house and possessions be blown into the air. By day little else is to be seen but

bombs — shells — powder-waggons — wounded — sick—prisoners. By day, and even more at night, the cannonading is almost continuous.

At this time of her life her correspondence is chiefly with her son.

For reasons too well known, Frau Aja, the faithful wife and true mother, could only send guarded messages of affection to her son's home. She uses such phrases as "Greet thy whole house from thy true mother," or, "Greet all that are dear to thee." But her heart is there, and it is a large heart; its affection cannot be curbed by convention.

When her son visited her in August 1792, he told her of his connection with Christiane Vulpius, and of their son August, then four years old. Frau Aja is a wise woman, sharing much of her son's knowledge of human nature, of which she makes sensible use in dealing with himself. Her heart's desire was that he should marry, therefore she accepts Christiane's position as nearly as possible as a wife's, and writes to her as such, sending many small gifts to her and to the child, very often articles of dress.

Amongst these latter, we are a trifle startled to find her sending some nankeen, to make breeches and waistcoat for the duke's Controller of Finances, the famous poet, Goethe. The material is still so good, she impresses on him, that he must not reject it because it was once a petticoat

of her own ; when it is made up no one will know what it was formerly !

At Christmas time Frau Aja is always busy, despatching boxes of Christmas gifts to her children and grandchildren. She spares no pains to find out the special taste of old and young.

But on one occasion she is quite angry with her son's request for nothing more nor less than a toy guillotine, for his boy. We all know that strange ferocity that young children, especially boys, evince, which sometimes vents itself on the dolls of their sisters. It is probably a natural phase in the evolution of the human mind ; but, be this as it may, we can readily sympathise with the grandmother's horrified refusal.

It appears that this terrible toy had been invented when all minds, even the minds of children, were excited by the horrors taking place daily in France. Frau Aja writes, December 23, 1793 :

" Dear Son !—All that I can do to please you shall be done gladly and will give me pleasure—but to buy such an infamous murder machine—that I will do at no price. If I were in authority —the inventor should to the pillory—and the toy should be publicly burnt by the knacker. What ! to let youngsters play with such a fearful thing—to put murder and bloodshedding into their hands for a pastime—no, that will never do."

In 1794, on the advice of her son, Frau Aja resolved to sell the large house which had been her home for forty-six years. She must in spite of her resolute cheerfulness have felt lonely in the big empty dwelling. Every room must have reminded her of her husband's dominant personality, and of the children who had made it lively with games and laughter, of her boy, who was now the only loved one left her, and of the girl who had died far away from her.

The expense of keeping such a large place in repair must have been considerable, moreover, as long as she lived there, she was likely to have soldiers quartered on her in wartime, a state of things—now she was no longer young—both irksome and exacting. She writes to her son in January 1794 :

" In my life I have never so hotly and earnestly wished to be rid of—wine—house—library—and so forth."

But in those unsettled times it was hard to find a purchaser. Goethe pressed her most affectionately to make her home with him in Weimar, yet she was loath to leave Frankfurt, beloved by them both. Goethe thus describes his native city.

" If one started out quite early in the morning,

one found oneself in the purest air, though not actually in the country. Important buildings, which at that time did a town honour; gardens, laid out terrace-wise, so that they could be overlooked, with flowers and other showy beds; free outlook over the river to the farther side; often quite early a busy fleet of rafts and market boats and small craft lashed together, a softly gliding, living world in unison with loving tender emotion. Even the lonely tumbling waves and reed-like murmurs of a lightly moving stream were highly refreshing, and did not fail to throw a decidedly restful charm over those who drew near."

Here is the letter with which she thanks him for his thought for her,

"For your dear letter of 8th Jan., in which you offered me your help for getting away so heartily and lovingly, I thank you right from my heart. I have at present not the least fear—and just as little thought of going away. A panic of fright has indeed spead over the whole of Frankfurt, and it would not be surprising if one were torn away with the whirl. Fear is contagious like a cold—so I keep away from the cowards as much as I can—so as not to get my head turned—which is hard to avoid—for this is a general rendezvous where (as at a fire) every goose or empty pate can bring his sheaf of tittle-tattle; and as a child, to whom its nurse has told a ghost-story, is frightened by a white cloth hanging on the wall, so it is with us. They believe everything (if it only sounds fearful enough, whether probable or not),

they do not inquire into it in cold blood—it is all one, the more foolish, the sooner believed. As proof (among a thousand) take this story. On the 3rd Jan. comes Frau Elise Bethmann to me, in night attire, at seven o'clock in the evening, quite out of breath with running. 'Räthin! dear Räthin! I must let you know of the great danger. The enemy is bombarding Mannheim with red-hot balls—the commandant has said he cannot hold out longer than three days,' and so on. I remain quite calm and say quite coolly—'How are they managing then—that they are shelling Mannheim? They have no batteries—are they shelling from the flat shore? The balls, since they have to fly over the broad Rhine, must get quite cold, and the commandant will hardly proclaim, with drums, what he means to do. Who is your correspondent? Write to him: he was a coward.' Such rumours spread, and, since the Bethmanns are people of importance, everybody believes they have it from the fountain-head. There, I thank God that I have sense enough not to believe the *trierum trarum!*—and the best of it is that they do not believe good news! The government sent Senator Luther to the Duke of Braunschweig, and the merchant Jordis to General Wurmser, in order to learn with certainty the condition of affairs. Both came back with the best news and assurance, but that doesn't help—they will go on fearing. . . . The day before yesterday my neighbour Dübari, with wife and six children, was up and off. I wish all weak cowards would go, then they could not infect others. All the fuss and *wirrwar* has not given me an hour's worry, thank God—I sleep

my eight hours right off—eat and drink properly —frequent my Monday company, also ditto Sunday, regularly—and best of all, feel well."

She ends with the postscript: "Don't believe all the rubbish from here—there are many of Frau Bethmann's fiery balls amongst it."

This humorous, sensible and plucky letter gives a characteristic glimpse of the cheery, brave Frau Aja. She is not going to be uprooted by imaginary "fiery balls." She continues to look about for the ideal home she has in her mind's eye. It is to be situated on the side of the Roszmarkt, that has a view of the Zeil; it is to have the morning sun—on the ground floor there is to be a room with two windows, for her maid—a kitchen—courtyard—a place for storing wood—water—rain-pump—cellar. On the first story it is to have a dwelling-room with three windows, a view towards the Zeil—the bedroom, close by, with two windows looking into the courtyard—on the same floor, two other rooms, each with two windows towards the courtyard—a landing, that, she declares "would be quite grand": but—now comes the "but," the great "But"—it is only an idea, and not even built.

By-and-by she hears, from an agent, of such a house situated in the Goldenen Brunne in the Roszmarkt, but it has two flights of stairs and

Frau Aja is beginning to find stairs a trial. "You might look at it," suggests the agent.

"And it was well I took this wise advice—a day later my ideal would have been let to others —I should have been reduced to tearing my hair! Well, I went or rather ran there. In going up I tried the stairs thoroughly; I found them very good—and not extremely high—because the stories, although it is a new house, are not so very lofty. I looked at the landing—fine—large —just what I had wished; but when I came into the rooms—I assure you—I was struck dumb with astonishment. No such view—no such position is to be met with in the whole town—the kitchen is light and pretty—a large dining-room—large wood-store—*summa summarum*—just my ideal. As for the two flights of stairs, well, they were not in my plan, but I considered that, in our house, I have to go up and down stairs for clothes, china, and such-like—which are all kept upstairs—and then, Frau Aja does not run about, but only goes out once in the day, and the stairs are good in themselves."

Two more months in the old home, whilst the new one is being prepared; one more uncomfortable quarter of a year, then she hopes—happy and contented—calmly to watch the course of affairs and just ask every Alexander to stand out of her sunlight.

She will furnish her three rooms in the new

Photo Evans

THE ROSSMARKT, FRANKFURT
(PRESENT DAY)

house prettily and neatly, but all kling-klang must be sold.

The move was effected with little discomfort—two Prussian soldiers carried all her things—she required neither packing-cases nor carts—and nothing was damaged in the least.

"You will be pleased," she writes to her son, "when you see how snugly I am lodged. I am arranged excellently. I have just as much as I need—three pretty rooms in a row, one with four windows, for sitting and reception room, a second with three windows is my bedroom—and the one with two windows my two maids have. I have arranged this last so prettily that when I have the delight of seeing you here, it will be your room —I shall lodge my people out."

She has now no multitude of rooms, red, blue, and yellow. Her sitting-room, long and narrow, is papered with sober brown. She thought this colour blended well with the morning twilight which touched the tower of the Katharine Church and passed into her room. What need had she now of those gaily coloured rooms, which must have held sad memories though she stoutly kept them silent?

So much for the interior of her new home. She is delighted with the view from the windows. She can see down the Zeil as far as the Darmstadt Hof. All that goes in and out of the Katharine Gate can be seen, and all the Brocken-

heimer Street. For view, she declares it is, without dispute, the first house in Frankfurt.

At eleven o'clock she can see the sentries parade and all march by with military music. Even on wet days she says—with her characteristic cheerfulness—it is quite amusing to see so many umbrellas, they form quite a variegated roof.

In this new home she settles down quite comfortably, and is not now, having less accommodation, subjected to the nuisance of billeting.

"I am cheerful and of good courage," she writes to her son; "have not let one grey hair grow on account of the war."

She does little work and who gets a letter from her may brag of it: "The weather is too fine—my view too delightful. If you were not Wolfgang—you would have had to wait."

CHAPTER XVIII

BOMBARDMENT OF FRANKFURT

In Harren und Krieg,
In Sturz und Sieg
Bewuszt und grosz !
So risz er uns
Vom Feinde los. *

Goethe to Prince Blücher.

HOWEVER, the peace Frau Aja so much valued was not to be allowed her in her new home. Even *her* courage at last succumbed. On July 22, 1796, she writes to her son :

"You will have learnt from the newspapers what is the present situation of your Father town—but since the diary of Frau Aja is not to be found there entire, and I am confident that you are not indifferent as to how I have come through this period, a little account of it will not be out of place. I was not the least afraid of the French and their entrance. I was firmly persuaded they

* In battle or retreat,
In victory or defeat,
Restrained and great !
He saved us from
The enemy's cruel hate.

would not plunder—wherefore then should I pack up? I left everything in its position and place and was quite calm—also no one believed that the imperial troops* would stay here—but as the sequel showed that was a mad idea. Since they have done so the matter began to be serious. The house in which I live is in time of peace one of the finest in the town—but so much the more fearful in such days as those just past. The imperial commandant lived just opposite me, so I saw the whole spectacle,† the French with their eyes bound—our burgomaster all in terror what would come of it—and so forth. On the 12th towards evening the bombardment began. We all sat in the lowest room belonging to our landlord; when it left off a little I went to sleep. About two o'clock in the early morning it began again and brought us out of bed. Now I began to clear out, not for fear of the French, but of fire: in a couple of hours everything was in the cellar down to the iron safe, which was too heavy for us to move—I sent for my brother-in-law Major Schuler's orderly and another strong man—they carried it safely into the cellar. Up to that time I was quite calm, but now came such dreadful news of one and another (of people I knew) who had been struck dead by a howitzer—one had an arm, one a foot and so on torn from the body—that I began to feel a horror, and I resolved to go, but not far—only just to escape the bombardment—but there was no conveyance to be had for money. At last I heard that a family

* German troops. † Republican prisoners.

from my neighbourhood was going to Offenbach. I sent to ask them to take me, and they agreed with great courtesy. I am not one of the nervous souls, but this frightful night, which I spent quite peacefully with Mamma La Roche, might in Frankfurt have cost me my life or at any rate my health. Therefore the 12th, 13th and 14th I remained in my free town. On the 15th early came news that a capitulation had been resolved upon, and nothing more need be feared for body and life—only one must not delay a day before returning, because on the 16th the French would enter and after that the gates would be closed. So I would not at any price remain in Offenbach —first, because they would take me for an emigrant—secondly, because my pretty rooms being quite empty (for I had brought my maids with me) might be taken away. Now I was in a fine dilemma! again there was no vehicle to be had. Then our old friend Hans Andre took pity on me, gave me his sweet little carriage and I was quickly again in the Goldenen Brunne! and I thank God with my whole heart for preserving me and my home. It is quite easy to understand how a great misfortune sets aside a small one. When the cannonading left off, we were as in heaven—we looked on the French as saviours of our property and protectors of our homes—for if they had been so minded no house would have remained, and to put out the fires they harnessed the horses to the fire engines, which hastened up from the villages. God grant us peace! Amen! Farewell!"

On August 1 she writes again:

"You have asked to know more details about the misfortune to our town. One must have an extraordinary faculty for order to be able to see into the affair clearly. In closest confidence I tell you that the imperial party was the cause of it. Since they were not in the position to keep the French in check—for they were at our gates and Frankfurt is not fortified—it was madness, as they could gain nothing by it, to bring misfortune on the town. But with all this apparently no house would have been burnt down, if the fatal idea (which no one dared to utter) that the French intended to plunder, had not got the upper hand. The misfortune arose in the Jews' quarter—for everything had been cleared out there—hardly a living being was left there—and the madness went so far that they placed great padlocks on empty houses. When it took fire, first, no one could get into the bolted-up houses without force; secondly, there were no Jews there to put it out; thirdly, in the houses there was naturally not the least preparation. If the Christians had behaved as idiotically, the whole town would have been burnt down. In all their houses were great water-butts on the ground floors, so that when a shell set fire to anything there were wet clothes, dirt and such things at hand, so that, thank God—the whole Ziel—the Great and Little Eschenheimer Streets — the Tönges and Fahr Streets, were saved—and not a house was burnt down—better than that—nothing that was worth the trouble of saving. In the other

Photo Frith

THE JUDENGASSE, FRANKFURT
(JEW'S STREET)

part of the town, the Römerberg Mainzer Street, little harm was done. In the Friedberger Street our old house* was burnt down and the Yellow Stag behind it. None of our friends and acquaintances suffered—only some one I know, a merchant Graff, sustained a great loss through the notion that there would be plundering. He thought that if he deposited all his goods with some one who was in the Prussian service, and where the Prussian Eagle waved over the entrance, all would be safe. A Prussian lieutenant lived in our old house in the Friedberger Street, so the good-man stowed all his goods and chattels there in a wooden coach-house. They have all been burnt, and the many barrels of oil, and the immense provision of sugar—he was a grocer—made the fire more terrific. Other people followed this unfortunate example—carried out of their own safe houses all their possessions—money — plate — beds — furniture — into this unlucky house, and lost all. Indeed, the notion about plundering cost the town more money than the fire even, for there are houses that paid for packing and removing 600–1000 and more still. That the good Hetzler and Schlösser have been taken as hostages, you will have learnt from the papers. Our present position is from all points of view critical and serious—but to worry and despair before the time was never my way—rather to trust in God—to make the best use of the present moment—not to lose one's head—to keep free from sickness (for it would be a bad time for that)—since this has always answered hitherto I

* The Textor *Stammhaus*.

will keep to it. As most of my friends have emigrated—there is no comedy acting—no one stays in the gardens. I am mostly indoors—I play the clavier and thump away, until I might be heard at headquarters—read from the *Musen Calendar* the history of the world by Voltaire—enjoy my splendid view—and thus good and less good days pass by."

On September 17 she writes:

"We are again in imperial hands—God grant we remain so until the peace! For the last seven weeks we have been drawing our breath as if under the hand of the executioner. We lived in daily dread of things that did not happen. The 7th of September was especially trying to me; in the square, the whole of which I overlook now, I saw several sights which did not please me. I thanked God when night came, for then it was quiet. On the 8th early, about 5 o'clock, I rose and saw, to my unspeakable joy, our Frankfurt soldiers at the main guard-station. Not trusting my eyes, I fetched my glasses, and there they went up and down with sticks (for the French had taken away all arms). What I then felt cannot be described—that I thanked God heartily goes without saying—and in the evening to hear our own tattoo was to me more lovely than an opera of Mozart. We have again got so far! —God will help us further. Burgomaster Schweitzer has done much—the whole city almost bears him on its hands. Our business houses wished to drag him in triumph to the Römer—but he forbid it."

Notwithstanding her pluck, this letter reveals the Räthin's excitement. The Christmas of 1796 passed peacefully. Frau Aja was able to arrange and dispense her Christmas gifts without let or hindrance. But in the summer there is fresh alarm. She writes on June 2, 1797, to her son:

"The last news (God grant it were) threatened our town with more misfortune and harm than all that had gone before—for we are like people who lie fast asleep in peaceful rest and the greatest security—because they think they have extinguished fire and light—so we thought —and in a trice foresight and care were useless. We were again in the greatest trouble. Already last year on 2nd December, Senator Milius had brought from the National Convention in Paris (where he had stayed six weeks)—a treaty of neutrality with our town. The declaration was expressed excellently in our favour. We were particularly commended for the last retreat of 8th September 1796. Who would not have felt easy about it? So we were—no one emigrated—no one sent anything away—our chief strangers who had come for the fair, particularly the silversmiths from Auspurg (*sic*), kept their booths open and remained quiet. The French were near to the town—we expected them in an hour —the imperialists were too weak to resist—we had been declared neutral—therefore there was no talk of bombardment. Contentedly I peeped out of the window to see them arrive—it was the middle of the day about two o'clock—all at once

comes Fritz Metzlern bursting into my room crying, quite out of breath, 'Räthin it is peace! The Commandant von Milius has a courier from Bonaparte—there is a jubilation. Adieu! I must spread the news further,' and so on! Directly after comes Burgomaster Schweitzer and Syndicus Seger in a carriage, going to drive to the French camp to congratulate Le Feber. When they reached the sentries they were surrounded by citizens—the carriage had to stand still. They confirmed the good news of peace. Old and young waved their hats—it was a jubilee not to be expressed—who in the world would have foreboded misfortune? Not six minutes after this unspeakable joy came the imperial cavalry riding in at the Brockenheimer Gate (it was a thing to see, it cannot be described)—one without a hat—here a horse without a rider, and so they tore down the Zeil—shots too were heard—all was astonishment. What kind of peace is this? cried one and another. Now to our rescue. An imperial lieutenant had the presence of mind (without orders) to ride full gallop to the city gates and have them closed and the drawbridge raised although the imperialists had not all got into the town. It was lucky for us, for the French would have stormed in after and massacre would have been let loose in the town. If it had been a citizen who had taken upon himself to do this, then there would have been plundering and all that horror would have come about—and in the end it would have been said we had broken the neutrality—killed the French and so forth. Burgomaster Schweitzer and Seeger were

plundered. Le Feber would not believe in the peace—he had had no courier sent him—he knew nothing about our neutrality. At length the imperial commandant persuaded General Le Feber to come with him into the town—assured him on his honour that peace had been concluded —and that the courier could not reach all the generals at the same time. So he went with them. The Burgomaster Schweitzer and several of the magistrates went into the Römer and drank the Emperor's health—and all ended happily for us. So it is the brave lieutenant and the host of the White Lamb in Ausburg we have to thank for our salvation. The first closed the gate without orders—the second showed the courier a short cut to Frankfurt, so that he arrived six hours earlier on that account. God has helped us in our great need by small means, and if my faith in Eternal Providence ever wavers again I shall say to myself: 'remember the 22nd April.'"

At last, December 4, 1797, she is able to write:

"Now we are preparing for the peace festival—our excellent scene-painter is painting the decorations—the sing-song is also ready—drums and trumpets are at hand,—it will be a jubilee! Trumpets will be sounded at the main guard! all my friends want to see the jubilee from my window—after so much tribulation one deserves to have some joyful days once more."

These graphic letters give us a vivid picture of the discomfort and suspense Frau Aja must have

lived through at this time, but she had a stout German heart, and when we consider that she was sixty-six years of age, and had no relative with her to support and counsel her, we cannot but admire her courage and decision.

She is very proud of the patriotism of her fellow-citizens. She sends her son some sheets of the *Advertiser* with the exclamation, "Look at this and be proud that you are a Frankfurt citizen."

"At the end of the week," she writes, "3000 f. have been collected, which every week until 1st March are set apart for providing for our brothers the brave Germans. That's what I call having German blood in our veins. Our merchants' sons belonging to the chief firms all wear uniforms, and have made agreement with the lower-class shoemakers and tailors to stand by their Father town in time of need. Our butchers have hardly a shirt left—they have taken them all to the hospital—and all this from goodness of heart—and of their own free will. How can any one wonder that Frankfurt is rich—is green and flourishing—God must reward such things! Now enough of my brave countrymen—in comparison with whom all other imperial towns must hide their heads."

On May 19, 1801, she writes:

"We hardly know ourselves in our present good fortune, that there are no more war people around and about us—and that (thank God!!!)

we are still as we were before! The French ambassador appointed to our town has brought a very friendly letter from Bonaparte to our authorities. Indeed, indeed there is still some bitterness with the sugar—the war tax, which had to be paid again in this month, awoke no pleasant feeling."

And with this letter we gladly close Frau Aja's war experiences.

CHAPTER XIX

OLD AGE WITH HONOUR

I rejoice in my life because the lamp still glows —look for no thorns—treasure up small pleasures —if the doors are low I stoop—if I can move the stone out of the way I move it—is it too heavy, I go round it—thus I find each day something that pleases me—and the corner-stone is—I have faith in God, that makes my heart joyful and my countenance bright.

Letter of Frau Aja.

IT is pleasant to have to record that Frau Aja's long life ended in "peace with honour."

On July 20, 1799, she has a most gratifying piece of news to write to her son:

"A quite unexpected honour has befallen me—the Queen invited me through her brother to go to her. The Prince came about midday to me and dined at my little table; at 6 o'clock he fetched me in a carriage with two servants to the Taxis Palace. The Queen talked to me of old times—remembered the many delights in my former house—the good pancakes and so on.* Dear God! what an effect such things have on people.

* See p. 248.

It was in a moment at all the coffee houses and wine-shops, in great and small society—for some days. Nothing else was talked of but how the Crown Prince of Mecklenburg had been sent to fetch the Frau Rath to the Queen—and how I was bothered to tell all that happened—in a word, I had a nimbus round my head that was very becoming."

The old *bürgerliche* Räthin could not but be flattered by this condescension on the part of the Queen of Prussia, for Luise Auguste, wife of Friedrich Wilhelm III., was one of the elect among princesses whose rank is not merely the guinea's stamp but the hall-mark of true gold.

The beautiful and accomplished Queen of Prussia, at the time when she did such becoming honour to the mother of Germany's greatest poet, was still happy, admired and beloved by her nation. A few years later she, with her husband, was an exile without dominion.

In the time of her country's peril, she did her utmost to soften the unscrupulous conqueror's heart. She stooped even to the great humiliation of entreaty, with no avail. Napoleon, whilst recognising her charm and ability, would yield no portion of his prey.

He could gallantly offer her a rose, but when she petitioned for her town of Magdeburg, he had only a snub for the distressed Queen. "I must

observe to your Majesty that it is *I* who give, and you must only receive."

"Is it possible," she exclaimed, "that after having had the good fortune to be so near the Hero of the Age, he has not left me the satisfaction of being able to assure him that he has made me grateful for life?"

"Madame," said the astute Emperor, "I regret that it is so; it is my evil destiny."

This from the man who was ruling the destiny of Europe was hardly convincing. He admired the Queen, yet he had no pity for the woman.

This is his written tribute to her strength of character:

"The Queen of Prussia unquestionably possessed talents, great information and singular acquaintance with affairs. She was the real sovereign for fifteen years. In truth, in spite of my address and utmost efforts, she constantly led the conversation, returned at pleasure to her subject, and directed it as she chose, but still with so much tact and delicacy that it was impossible to be offended."

We cannot be surprised then, that Frau Aja was gratified and flattered by the kindness of the Queen of Prussia, and on June 19, 1803, she received still greater honour from the same royal hand, which, as usual, she describes enthusiastically to her son.

"The great joy which befell me on Sunday 19th June, it would be a sin not to tell you about, therefore listen to what has happened. The King and Queen of Prussia were at Wilhelmsbad—the Queen declared that she must see and speak with the Räthin Goethe—and accordingly measures were taken to bring me to her. The Countess von Leiningen let me know the command of her Majesty, and came at two o'clock in the middle of the day, to fetch me in a beautiful carriage harnessed to four swift horses. At half-past four we were in Wilhelm's Baad—I was taken into a beautiful room, then the Queen appeared, like the sun among stars—was heartily pleased to see me, presented me to her three sisters—the Duchess von Hillburghauszen, the Crown Princess of Thurn and Taxis, and the Princess of Solms. The latter and the Queen remembered with much pleasure the time of the coronation, my house and so forth. When I was so truly in the mood for rejoicing, who should come too? Our Duke of Weimar! God!!! what a delight for me—Oh! how much that was sweet and good he said to me about you. I thanked him with a touched heart—for all the gracious care he had shown you in your last troublesome illness. He said (also much moved) 'he would have done as much for me—thirty years we have been comrades and forborn with each other.' I was so excited I could have laughed and wept at the same time. In this frame of mind as I was, the Queen sent for me into another room—the King came too—the Queen went to a press and brought out a costly gold necklace, and, wonder!!! fastened it round

my neck with her own hands. Moved to tears—I could only thank her badly. In this costly ornament I returned to the room where were our excellent Duke and the three sisters of the Queen—who showed great joy at my splendid transformation. To exhaust all that happened to me on this for me so glorious day would be impossible—enough that I returned at ten in the evening pleased and happy to the Goldenen Brunnen."

The illness of Goethe alluded to in this letter was most serious. Had it not been for the great solicitude of the Duke of Weimar, who sent an express to Jena for a specialist to come post-haste to his beloved Minister and poet, it might have brought about that event which, as we shall see, Frau Aja had not the courage even to mention in writing.

Goethe did not have his aged mother informed of his suffering until he could relieve her of anxiety, dreading the effect it might have on one whose whole life was bound up in his.

It has been said that she would not be told about it to avoid pain to herself. How far this is from the truth is shown by the following letter written to her son on January 31, 1801 :

"God be praised and thanked! that He so graciously and so quickly has turned aside the great danger that threatened you. Ach! what a fine thing is ignorance! Had I known of the evil

which had befallen you before there was an improvement, I think I must have succumbed with misery—but as it was I was cheerful and pleased on the very critical days—and again it was very good that I had the news of your recovery, or it might have been more terrible still—for the letter of my dear daughter * arrived early on Sunday at 11 o'clock. I had promised the Syndic Schlösser to take them to the play in the evening. . . . I said not a word of your illness—bad news spreads like a prairie fire—and that's a thing I can't bear —but now this is why it was such a good thing, that I had heard of your recovery. Herr Merchant Friederich Schmidt in the box next mine asked what news I had of you: you must be very ill, he said—for the duke had sent an express to Jena for a skilled physician to come to you. Now just consider, I beg you, if I had not had that good letter about the improvement, I think my fear would have killed me. I said quite shortly that you were better again, but asked where he had the news.—'A cousin of mine'—he said—'is studying in Jena; he wrote to tell me.' Inwardly I thanked God for that letter received only a couple of hours before—and felt tolerably easy. Now I hope that you are quite restored—also that you, with your beautiful brown eyes, will look again joyously on God's creation, and I beg soon for news of the progress of your recovery, so that my soul with glad mouth and heart may thank God! Lay my most earnest thanks at the feet of his Royal Highness for all the gracious care and love this excellent prince has

* Christiane Vulpius.

shown you in these evil and dangerous days. God bless the best prince and the whole princely house in time and eternity for it. Amen. Farewell! Let me soon hear something good of you again."

On February 7, 1801, she writes:

"Dear Son!—Your feeling better, and particularly a letter in your own handwriting, has made me so happy and in the mood for writing that I answer by return of post. The 6th February, when I received your to me so dear letter, was a jubilee, a festival of thanksgiving and prayer for me. . . . Our whole town was in alarm about your illness—and when your recovery was in the papers—it rained papers in my room—everybody wanted to be first, to bring me the glad news."

If she had Dr. Faustus' mantle she would visit those she loved at Weimar but she so prizes the order of her home she will not venture to disturb it. If good news comes from time to time from Weimar, she says, "I am happy and praise God."

"Weimar is the true seat of the Muses, the German Athens," she writes. "The happy inhabitants can form their taste aright—they see nothing but what is beautiful and excellent—their eyes become accustomed to beautiful forms; they are cultured, when we poor mortals remain ever children."

She complains that her fellow-townsmen are too fond of eating.

"With the money spent on their entertainments, a great academy for painting and drawing might be maintained—and these Bacchanalia look as like tedium as one drop of water is like another."

Describing her amusements she says that she especially enjoys the fortnightly reading society. There they read the *Jungfrau von Orleang* (*sic*), *Ceancret* (*sic*), *Mahomet*, *Maria Stuardt* (*sic*), *Macbeth* by Schiller.

If Frau Aja could have read *Macbeth* in the original, she would hardly have been contented with Schiller's clarified version, wherein the weird and rugged witches become classic and tuneful sorceresses.

Frau Aja sincerely loved Schiller, the patient sufferer and sweet singer, and many are the kind messages she sends him in her letters.

In 1804 Madame de Staël paid Germany her celebrated visit of inquiry. It is evident that Frau Aja did not find her society less disturbing than did Goethe and Schiller. The latter says that after her departure he felt as if he had been through a long illness.

"The only troublesome thing about her," he writes, "is the extraordinary readiness of her

tongue; one has to turn oneself entirely into an organ of hearing to keep up with her."

From passages in the Goethe-Schiller correspondence it is apparent that both the German poets were a little afraid of her lively French wit. She told Goethe, with a naïveté that appalled him, that she intended to collect and publish all he said.

Frau Aja writes:

"She oppressed me like a millstone round my neck—I got out of her way, kept apart from company which she frequented, and breathed more freely when she had gone. What did the lady want with me? I have never in my life written even an ABC book, and in the future my genius will keep me from doing so."

On October 19, 1806, Goethe made Christiane Vulpius his wife. His mother had long wished it, and in a letter of the 27th she tells him: "Now you have done after the wish of my heart."

Although Frau Aja was now quite an old woman, her letters are still cheery and vivacious. She writes a long one about the autumn fair.

"It was," she says, "rich in professors!!! Since a large portion of your fame and renown is reflected on me, and people believe I have contributed to your great talent, so they come

to look at me—then I do not put my light under a bushel but on a candlestick. I assure the folk that I have contributed nothing to make you the great man and poet you are (for I will not take praise which is not my due); perhaps a grain more or less of brain and you would have been quite an ordinary man, and where nothing is within nothing can come out. . . . Now about my light which stood on the candlestick and shone beautifully into the professors' eyes! My gift which God has given me is a lively representation of all things which are impressed in my knowledge, great and small, truth and fairy-tales, and so on, so that when I come into a circle all are cheerful and glad because I tell stories. That is the whole art. One thing more—I always put on a friendly face. That pleases people and costs no money."

A letter dated December 14, 1807, will give a specimen of Frau Aja's talent for fable-telling:

"It snows here as in Lapland. Let it snow or hail for me. I have two warm rooms and am quite comfortable. In such stormy weather I stay at home—who wants to see and hear me must send a carriage for me—and it is a great pleasure to me to be so quite alone in the evening. Frau Aja! Frau Aja! When you are once set going either chattering or writing, you go on like a wound-up meat-jack. Meat-jack? the simile is not so bad; it is not wound up when it is either fast-day or there is poverty—but if there is something on the spit for the use and benefit of the

family. I think, therefore, I will let it go until I have given you a little idea of my evening happiness. Once on a time a stranger came to St. John, who had heard much of John. The man imagined him studying manuscripts, sitting lost in contemplation, and so on. He visited him, and to his great astonishment the great man was playing with a partridge that ate from his hand—and he played a thousand jokes with the tame little creature. John saw the astonishment of the stranger, but pretended not to notice it. During the conversation John said, 'If any one has a bow, does he leave it strung the whole day?' 'Forbid,' said the stranger, 'no archer would do that: the bow would be weakened.' 'It is just the same with the soul of man,' said John; 'it must be unstrung, or it would be weakened.' Well, I am no John, but I have a soul which, though it dictates no revelation to me, yet is strung the whole day in small things, and, considering that it inhabits a body 76 years old, absolutely must be unstrung. There is no talk of such a thing when I am among good friends—then I laugh with the youngest—there is no talk of it at the play, for perhaps there are not six persons there who have such a lively sense of the beautiful as I, or who are so richly amused. But I am talking of when I am quite alone at home and already at half-past four have a light. Then I fetch my partridge—then I am so eager with it that no soul must come to me. The matter is no secret: all my friends know what I call my partridge—but what they would not understand is that a woman like me could pass her solitary

hours with it—their souls, which have been strung all day, as one can easily tell by their conversation, have nevertheless no idea of being unstrung. When, therefore, it is 5 o'clock with you, think of her who remains

"Your true Mother
"GOETHE."

Frau Aja's partridge wherewith she refreshed her soul was doubtless the writings of her son. They were then giving delight to all Germany: can we wonder that the aged mother found in them a solace for her hours of solitude?

In this year she lost her old friend the Duchess Amalia, who died in April. She mentions the sad event in a letter to her son:

"The death of our dear duchess touched me uncommonly, the beautiful memories I still have of her are now doubly dear and precious to me —for many years we have (as often happens in human life) got separated, but the friendly remembrance of former times has never been effaced from my memory—particularly those happy days in the red house."

She is not so strong as she used to be, she feels the winter more; in March she writes:

"The grandmother is this winter quite allegro —she keeps herself, because of her deadly enemy

the north-east wind, as in a band-box of cotton-wool—has not been to a comedy the whole winter through—yet all the more to her good friends—but wrapped in fur from head to foot."

Alas! old age comes on apace.

CHAPTER XX

DEATH

Denn ein Gott hat
Jedem seine Bahn
Vorgezeichnet,
Die der Glückliche
Rasch zum freudigen
Ziele rennt: *
Harzreise im Winter.

THE letter quoted at the end of the last chapter is dated March 1808, and in that year Frau Aja died.

This chapter shall be a short one. To dwell on the sadder scenes, when earthly existence is drawing towards its close, would be to pause on a note out of tune with the cheerful music of her life.

To bear old age patiently, nay, cheerfully, requires the noblest courage, the firmest faith.

* For a God hath
To each one
His path assigned,
He who is blest
Quickly and joyfully
Reaches his goal.

Frau Aja had both. To one inquiring after her health at a time when it was clearly waning she said :

" Thank God, I am once more contented with myself, and can endure myself for a few weeks longer. Till now I have been quite intolerable and have striven against God like a little child that never knows what it needs. But yesterday I could stand myself no longer : I gave myself a good scolding, and said, 'Ei! art thou not ashamed of thyself, old Räthin! Thou hast had good days enough, and Wolfgang besides, and now when the evil days come, thou shouldst make the best of them and not pull such a face about it! What does it mean that thou art so impatient and naughty when the blessed God lays a cross on thee? Dost thou want, then, to walk upon roses for ever? and art past the goal, over seventy years old!!' Look you, this is what I said to myself, and directly there set in an improvement, and I grew better because I was no longer so wrong-minded."

One of her friends, a " Saturday girl " * who spent much time with her, tells of her :

" During the last year of her life she was just as lively, and spoke of almost everything with equal interest ; from the most simple conversations were developed the most solemn and noble truths, which might have served for a talisman for one's entire life. She said, ' First learn to know every-

* The feather-brained but gifted Bettina von Arnim.

thing to the very last then mayest thou doubt; till then all is possible.'"

On July 1 she wrote to her daughter-in-law:

"This is the third letter I have written to-day! The heat is very great to-day—I can do nothing properly—therefore excuse the shortness—another time more."

The letter written on the same date to her son is as cheerful and descriptive as ever: only one passage testifies to infirmity: "Writing—thumb-screwing it is to me—to-day I have written three letters!!" But she adds a kind postscript: "If an actor of the name Werdi should by chance call on you, be good to him."

These letters were written in July. At the end of August evident signs of weakness set in, so that her grandchildren, the daughters of Cornelia and Schlosser and of the latter by his second wife, became anxious, yet she would not have her son informed of her illness.

Her one great dread had been lest she should outlive him. In 1797 he had asked her—when starting on a journey—to make a formal renunciation of any right of inheritance she had in his property. In her answer of eager acquiescence she added:

"Although I know quite certainly God would never allow me to survive your—— I cannot write that word."

Her prayer was fulfilled. During the last days of her life she constantly thought of him—thought of him as a little child.

"On Wolfgang I must think for hours together," she pathetically told her young friend; "how when he was a child, he played at my feet, and then how prettily he played with his brother Jacob and made stories for him."

She could conceive no more perfect or exalted happiness than for her son's sake to be so generally honoured, for his sake whom she loved so tenderly and understood so truly.

She would repeat passages from his books with a tender love in her eyes, and sing the songs he had written. The same young friend tells us: "The melodies were miserable and untrue compared with her impressive manner and the feeling which sounded forth in full measure from her voice."

But perhaps the most touching utterance of the dying mother was when she said that Mignon's song, "So laszt mich scheinen, bis ich werde," alone proved her son's deep religious feeling. "It is the spirit of truth encased in the body of nature," she declared. She called it her confession of faith.

The song alluded to so tenderly is thus translated by Carlyle:

Such let me seem till such I be;
Take not my snow-white dress away!
Soon from this dusk of earth I flee
Up to the glittering lands of day.

There first a little space I rest,
Then wake so glad, to scene so kind;
In earthly robes no longer drest,
This band, this girdle left behind.

And those calm shining sons of morn,
They ask not who is maid or boy;
No robes, no garments there are worn,
Our body pure from sin's alloy.

Through little life not much I toiled,
Yet anguish long this heart has wrung,
Untimely woe my blossom spoiled;
Make me again forever young.

"I well know it is coming to an end with me," she told her friend; then asked her to send as usual, Christmas gifts to her grandson, gifts such as she had taken such pleasure in choosing so many previous Christmases.

In the evening, when there was to be a concert such as she had so often enjoyed in health, she said: "Now as I fall asleep I will think of the music which will soon welcome me to heaven."

Thus she met the inevitable, submitting bravely to pain and weakness.

The day before the last, feeling herself weaker,

she sent for her nephew, who was her doctor, and asked quietly how long she had to live. On his answering evasively she said:

"Don't try to deceive me. I know that it is all up with me; say it straight out: how long I have to live." She heard calmly his reply, that she might live till noon next day, and only begged him not to leave her.

Not knowing of her serious illness, some friends sent her an invitation, and with a touch of her old humour she replied that she must ask to be excused since she had to die.

Towards the end her pain ceased. Softly and with quiet courage, merging into unconsciousness, she passed away.

Goethe had been absent from Weimar and was returning. The town was gay with flowers and garlands to welcome him. It was then that the news reached him of his mother's death. Anxious to spare her Hätschelhans pain, she had refused to have him told of the seriousness of her illness until it was unavoidable, until, in fact, the message was of *Death.*

That his diary is unwritten on that day tells more characteristically of the great "ready writer's" grief than the loudest outburst of lamentation could do. He, who wrote so readily of the joys and sorrows of his long life, had no utterance for this sorrow.

Death

Elizabeth Goethe was buried beside her husband, in the Textor family vault.

In 1844, some twelve years after Goethe's own death, a statue to his memory was erected in Frankfurt, his native city. It was unveiled with honourable ceremony. At the end of the day a touching and fitting tribute was paid: the laurel wreath that had crowned the statue was laid on the grave of his mother, "Frau Aja."

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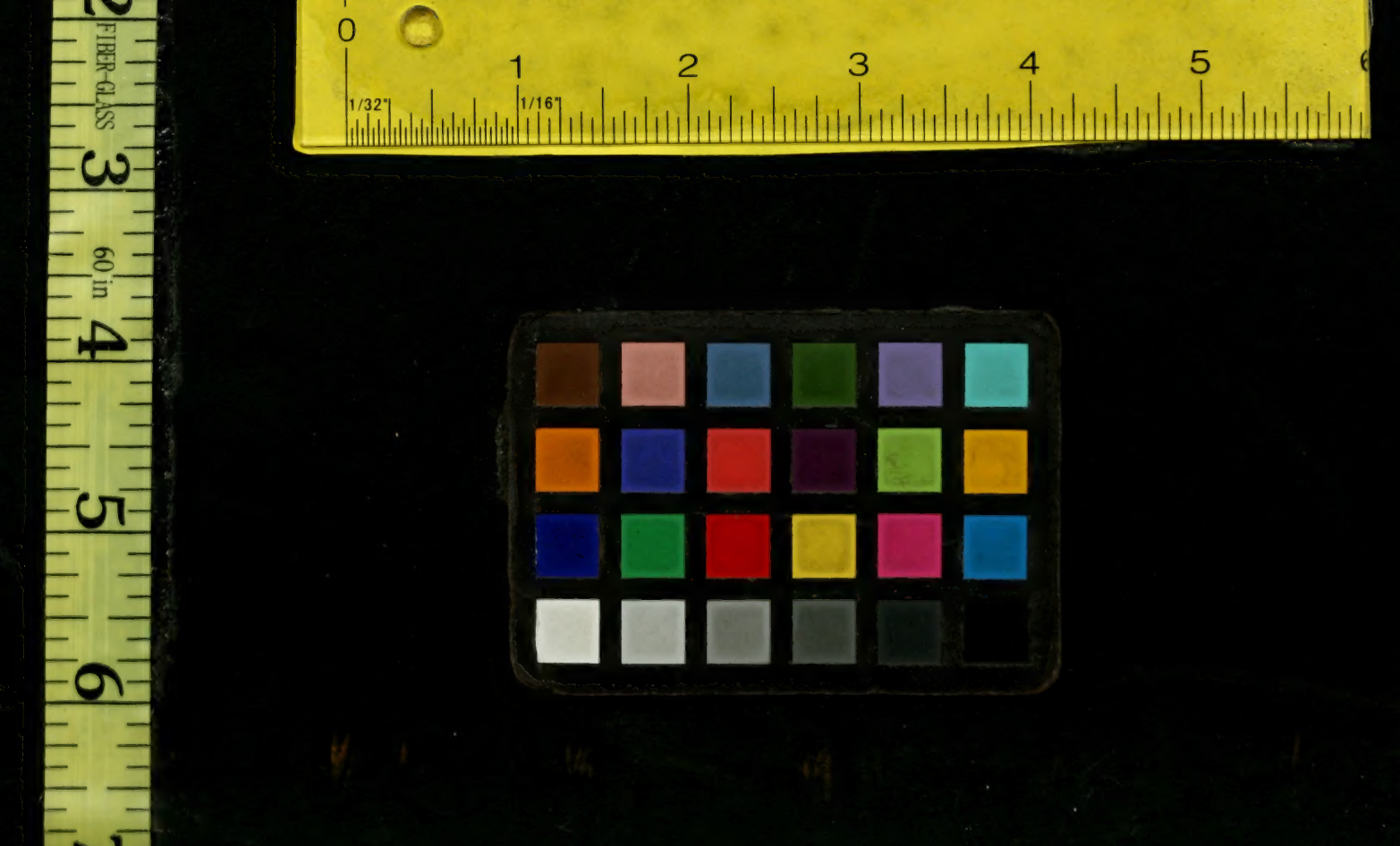
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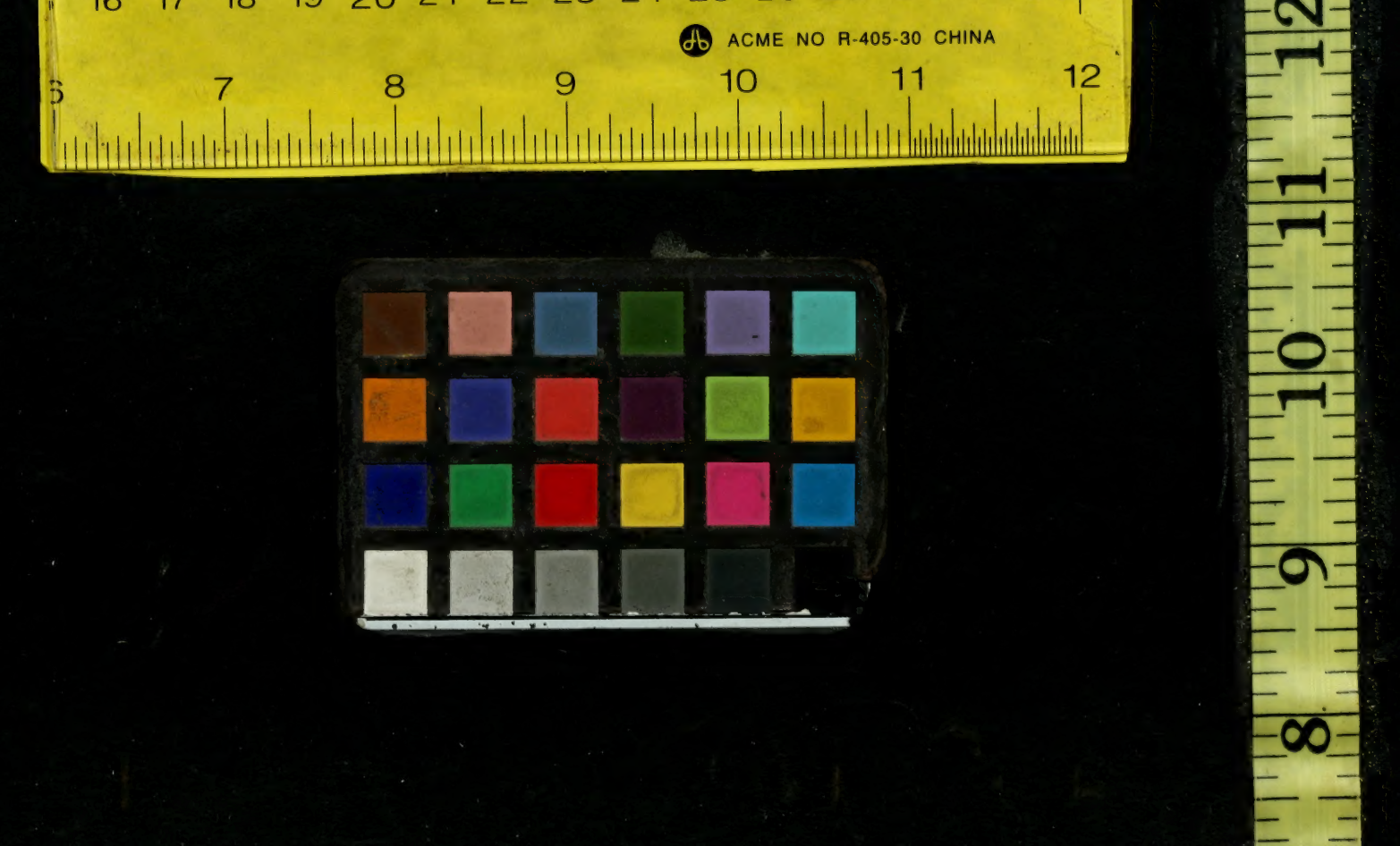
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